



WESTCOUNTRY  
SCHOOLS TRUST



# Chief Operating Officer (COO) Candidate Pack

Stronger Together...  
Every Child in a  
Great School

Life Changing Learning



# Welcome from Nat Parnell, Deputy CEO (CEO w.e.f. 1st January 2026)

This is a hugely exciting time at WeST. Our Trust now brings together 31 schools across south Devon, Plymouth and Cornwall, with a strong likelihood of further growth in the years ahead. Each school proudly retains its local identity, yet together we are united in one mission: Empowering ALL children to impact positively on society. Our vision is simple but powerful: Every child achieving in a great school.

We unashamedly strive for academic excellence. Our schools share this commitment, knowing that great outcomes create life chances and opportunities for young people. We are proud to place high expectations at the heart of our work, while ensuring that inclusivity remains central to everything we do.

Our Trust is moving towards a clustering model, enabling schools to retain their autonomy and distinctiveness whilst benefiting from the collective strength and support of a wider family. This interconnectedness forms the backbone of how we work. The best trusts run quietly in the background: you may not always notice them, but they provide essential support when it matters most. In WeST, what binds us together is not uniformity but a common set of shared values. To collaboration, aspiration, integrity and compassion, we add a further hallmark of our community: Respect – showing due consideration for the thoughts, feelings and beliefs of others.

We are deliberately large enough to sustain a high-quality central school improvement team, so that colleagues at the chalk face are supported to achieve the very best for children. Our shared services also play a vital role, providing excellent professional support to busy schools and leadership teams. By lifting the heavy load of background activity, we can do what matters most: do everything we can to enable teachers to be excellent in the classroom.

Collaboration across WeST offers a wealth of benefits: sharing best practice in teaching and learning, curriculum design, and staff development, as well as joint working in finance, HR, estates, governance, and wider school improvement. Beyond our boundaries, WeST remains outward-looking and proudly works in partnership with the South West Regions Group Director, the Teaching School Hub Council, Higher Education Institutions, The Local Authority and employers.

The role we are offering is rare and exceptional. The successful candidate will influence and shape the Trust's future direction, work alongside expert colleagues, and join a cross-phase family where the combined efforts of staff and schools are focused on giving children the very best start in life. There can be no greater privilege than to work with such wonderful pupils and super staff, whose commitment and passion drive everything we do.

I look forward to welcoming the successful candidate to our WeST community.



**Nat Parnell**  
Deputy CEO  
Westcountry Schools Trust





# About Westcountry Schools Trust (WeST)

Westcountry Schools Trust (WeST) is a united family of 31 schools across the South West (8 secondaries and 23 primaries), working together on the principle of “Stronger together ... every child in a great school.”

Our core ambition is to ensure every child has the opportunity to learn and succeed. Each school retains its individual identity, while we actively share what works, collaborate on best practice and build collective strength.

## Our values

At WeST we live by four core values:

- **Collaboration** – working across boundaries, building relationships and engaging inclusively.
- **Aspiration** – setting high expectations for ourselves and others, with a commitment to continual improvement and resilience.
- **Integrity** – putting children and young people at the heart of our decisions, communicating transparently and acting ethically.
- **Compassion** – recognising the needs of others, promoting wellbeing and improving outcomes.

These values are central to how we recruit, develop and support our staff, and how we engage with our schools and communities.

### Our current direction and the Chief Operational Officer role

WeST now stands at an important juncture. As the Trust evolves, we are shifting from a school-by-school operational model to a hub/cluster-based structure. By streamlining our services and bringing our operational functions under one strategy, we aim to build greater coherence, efficiency and impact.

We are seeking a Chief Operational Officer (COO) who will:

- lead the transformation of service delivery across the Trust, bringing all service areas together into a cohesive, coordinated whole;
- develop and implement an operations strategy for the entire Trust, aligned with our school improvement priorities;
- raise the profile of operational services, positioning them as valued partners in supporting teaching and learning;
- identify and drive efficiencies without compromising quality;
- work closely with the CEO, who is stepping back from day-to-day operations, to embed operational leadership and change at Trust level.

The COO will help the Trust move from today’s dispersed model to a unified operational structure that reflects our values, supports our strategic goals and ensures every school in the WeST family receives consistent, high-quality operational support.

### Why this matters

For WeST, outstanding education depends on strong operational systems, services and leadership. By strengthening this foundation, we enable school leaders to focus on teaching and learning, so the whole organisation can better serve our children and communities. The COO will play a key role in making this happen, bridging strategy and delivery, building operational excellence and driving sustainable change.





# Job Description

Job Title:	Chief Operations Officer (COO)
Location:	Across the Trust (Head Office Plymouth)
Grade/Salary:	Chief Officer – highly competitive
Hours:	Full-time, 37 hours per week
Reports to:	Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
Responsible for:	Director of Estates, Director of People, Head of Projects, Governance and Compliance Lead, Business Administration Manager
Key relationships:	Chief Finance Officer, Executive Leadership Team, Executive Headteachers (cluster-based), Headteachers, Operations Managers (cluster-based)

## Job Purpose

The Chief Operations Officer supports the effective operation of the trust and works to uphold and promote its vision and values.

To develop, implement and advance the WeST Operations Strategy, ensuring the delivery of high-quality services across the entire trust, with a particular emphasis on quality, efficiency and growth in line with the Trust Strategic Plan.

Identifying priorities and recommending solutions for the continuous improvement of operational services and leading trust-wide initiatives for change, advising stakeholders on risk implications and actively participating as a member of Trust Executive Leadership Team.

## Duties and Responsibilities

### Strategic:

1. At all times demonstrate and uphold WeST’s core values, ensuring that behaviour, actions and decisions align with the principles that guide our work.
2. To advocate for and maintain a culture of high performance and continuous improvement across trust operational services.
3. Develop, implement and advance the WeST Operations Strategy, ensuring the delivery of high-quality services across the entire trust, with a particular emphasis on quality, efficiency and growth in line with the trust Strategic Plan.
4. Work collaboratively with the Director of Estates, Director of People, Head of Projects and Governance and Compliance Lead, to oversee and coordinate trust operational services including Estates, HR, Governance, IT, Assessment, Comms and Marketing and central Business Administration. Drawing these together to ensure excellent project completion.





# Job Description

## Strategic (continued):

5. Establish and develop collaborative working partnerships with Directors and Executive Headteachers to facilitate continuous improvement through the sharing of best practice and change across central and cluster-based operational services.
6. Liaise with external stakeholders e.g. LA, Regions Team, other Trusts as appropriate etc. in the furtherance of operational services and as a representative of the Trust.
7. Identify priorities across operations directorates and clusters, and recommend appropriate solutions to better serve schools and business units.
8. Ensure the management of change is grounded in continuous improvement and is impactful in the delivery of the WeST Strategic Plan.
9. Develop clear, legally compliant and organisationally appropriate policies and practices, ensuring relevant consultation and governance.
10. Ensure effective communication and collaboration between operational services and functions in order to enhance the value to schools and business units.
11. Be an active member of the Trust Executive Leadership Team.
12. Have oversight and be responsible for operational and programme specific budgets.
13. Provide and present information and reports, including KPIs, for Executive and senior leadership, Trustees and those in governance.
14. Monitor changes to legislation or sector specific policy relevant to operational services, assess the impact and ensure any necessary changes to practice.

## Operational:

15. Work in partnership with the Chief Financial Officer, and the procurement function.
16. Work alongside the Head of Projects to determine and monitor project, ICT, data and assessment needs and contribute to strategic planning.
17. Work alongside the Director of Estates to determine and monitor capital estate, premises, estates regulatory compliance and health and safety needs and contribute to strategic planning.
18. Work alongside the Director of People to determine and monitor operational, compliance and employee relations Human Resources needs and contribute to planning.
19. Supporting the culture of safeguarding by proactively ensuring safeguarding is embedded into and visible across the operational systems of the Trust.
20. Participate and represent the Trust within national and local networks of professionals, so that the Trust is alert to developing best practice.
21. To have the highest regard for promoting and safeguarding the welfare of children and young persons.
22. To act in accordance with, and actively promote, all Trust policies, including Safeguarding, Health and Safety and Equality & Diversity.
23. To participate in Continuing Professional Development (CPD relevant to the role and to engage in Performance Development Reviews (PDRs).
24. Preparing and contributing to Trust wide development by sharing best practice and delivering/ receiving professional feedback.
25. To retain confidentiality and maintain data and/or files in accordance with Trust policies for data governance, as appropriate for the role.

*This job description provides a general reflection of the main duties and responsibilities of the post at the date of production. You may be expected to take on other reasonable activities deemed to be within the character of the post to assist in efficient service delivery. The duties may change over time as requirements and circumstances evolve without changing the general character of the post or level of responsibility.*





# Person Specification

**E = Essential**

**D = Desirable**

Method of Assessment The table indicates the possible method/s by which the skills/knowledge/ level of competence in each area will be assessed.	Essential or Desirable	Application Form	Interview (or other selection activity)
<b>Compassion:</b>			
Recognising need in others and acting with positive intention to promote well-being and improve outcomes	E		■
<b>Aspiration:</b>			
Works to high expectations, modelling the delivery of high-quality outcomes	E		■
Showing passion, persistence and resilience in seeking creative solutions to strive for continuous improvement and excellence	E		■
<b>Integrity:</b>			
Acting always in the interests of children and young people,	E		■
Acting with a consistent and uncompromising adherence to strong moral and ethical principles	E		■
Communicating with transparency and respect, creating a working environment based on trust and honesty	E		■
<b>Collaboration:</b>			
Creating a shared vision and working effectively across boundaries in an equitable and inclusive way to skilfully influence and engage others	E		■
<b>QUALIFICATIONS:</b>			
Degree-level education or equivalent	E	■	
Post graduate professional qualification in a relevant business area	D	■	
Relevant professional registration/membership	D	■	
<b>EXPERIENCE:</b>			
Proven successful senior leadership in education, the public sector or a large, complex and multi-site organisation	E	■	■
Strong track record in operational leadership across support services e.g. estates, HR, IT etc.	E	■	■
Evidence of impactful and successful systems leadership	E	■	■
Successful management of complex change initiatives	E	■	■
Experience of managing large teams	E	■	■
Experience in multi-academy trusts	D	■	■

## Method of Assessment

The table indicates the possible method/s by which the skills/knowledge/ level of competence in each area will be assessed.

## KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ABILITIES:

Strategic thinker with the ability to translate vision into operational delivery	E	■	■
Strong interpersonal and communication skills, including diplomacy and conflict resolution	E	■	■
Excellent organisational and project management skills	E	■	■
High emotional intelligence and motivational leadership style	E	■	■
A builder of effective partnerships within and externally facing	E	■	■
Understanding of education sector regulations	D	■	■
A deep understanding of safeguarding and active promotion of a safeguarding culture across operational services	E	■	■

## Procedures

All appointments are subject to pre-employment checks. That means:

- We are committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expect all staff and volunteers to share this commitment. A copy of our Child Protection Policy & Safeguarding Policy is available at: <https://www.westst.org.uk/attachments/download.asp?file=2533&type=pdf>
- Your identity will be confirmed by sight of original, official documents such as a Birth Certificate, Passport etc. in line with the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996
- Original documents relating to all the qualifications you have listed on your application form must be supplied
- Your employment history will be thoroughly examined and clarification will be sought where there are gaps or other discrepancies arising from information provided either by you as the candidate or your referee
- References will be used to check dates of employment and your relevant experience. A minimum of two written references will be taken up and these references will be requested before the interview
- References should cover the last 3-5 years' work history, as a minimum
- An online search of shortlisted candidates will be conducted in accordance with Part Three 'Safer Recruitment' of Keeping Children Safe in Education statutory guidance.
- The identity of referees and information relating to disclosures will be verified
- You will be required to provide details of any relevant unspent or spent convictions in accordance with the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) (Amendment) Order 1986
- An enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check will be requested. This check will be cross referenced against the Protection of Vulnerable Adults list (PoVA), the Protection of Children Act (PoCA) list and List 99. These lists contain details of people deemed unsuitable to work with children or vulnerable adults. Please note that it is an offence to apply, offer or accept to do any work with children (paid or unpaid) if disqualified from working with children. Applicants will be challenged where inconsistencies exist.
- Please be aware that a firm offer of appointment will only be made after receipt and verification of all satisfactory checks. Westcountry Schools Trust will carry out these checks and should you fail these checks, our offer of employment will be withdrawn.



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Westcountry Schools Trust  
51 Encombe Street  
Plymouth  
Devon  
PL9 7GN



## Arrange a visit / Apply

### **CLOSING DATE:**

Monday 5th January 2026

### **INTERVIEWS:**

Monday 26th January 2026

If you wish to discover more about this exciting opportunity or to arrange a visit, please contact Alpha Parish at Academicis (our recruitment partner):  
[aparish@academicis.co.uk](mailto:aparish@academicis.co.uk) | 07436 971517 | 01223 907979

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