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Confederation
of School Trusts

CST National Survey 2024

Deep Dive

School Improvement at Scale

November 2024

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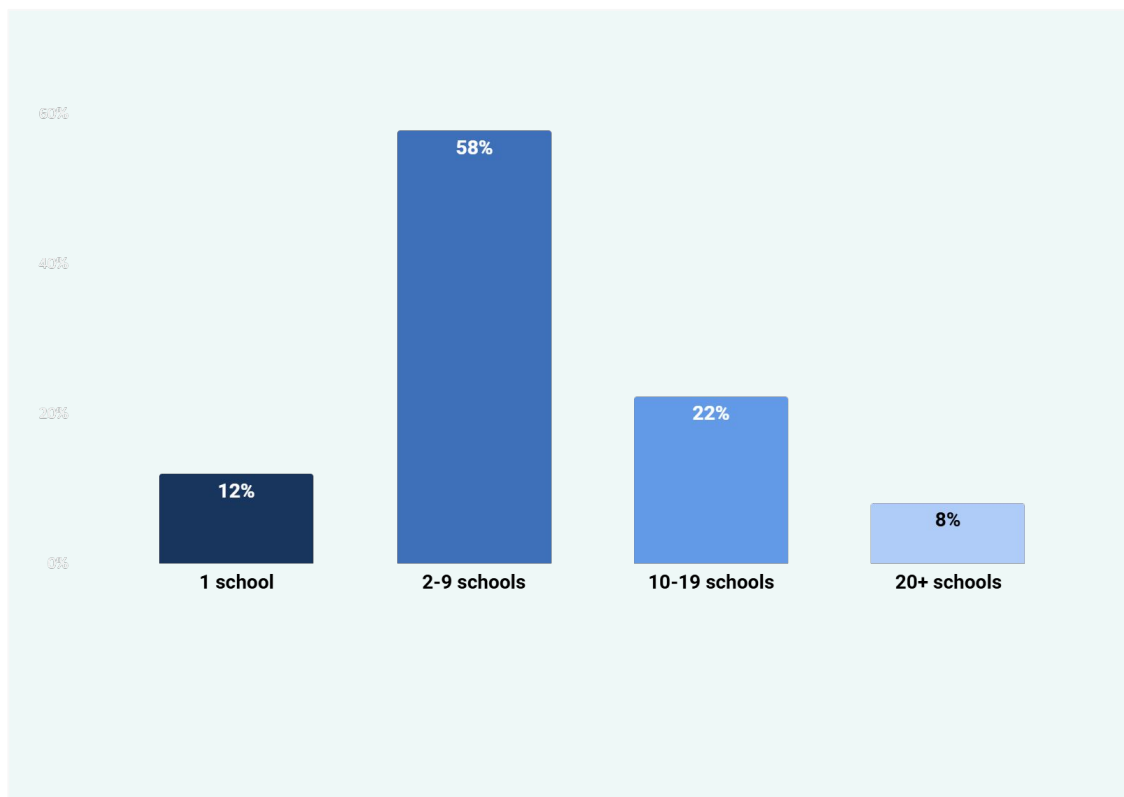
Research Methodology

Feedback from 417 Trusts

In June-July of 2024, the survey was answered by 417 trust accounting officers (the senior leaders directly responsible to Parliament for their trust, usually the CEOs) across England.

The survey covered trusts of all sizes, from trusts with single academies to running dozens of schools, making it a representative sample of school trusts across the sector.

Feedback was focused on trust experience and priorities for the 2024/25 academic year.



Survey designed around the CST's Strong trusts framework

The design of the survey is informed by CST's Building Strong Trusts framework and explores accounting officers' priorities and challenges across the various elements of trust leadership.



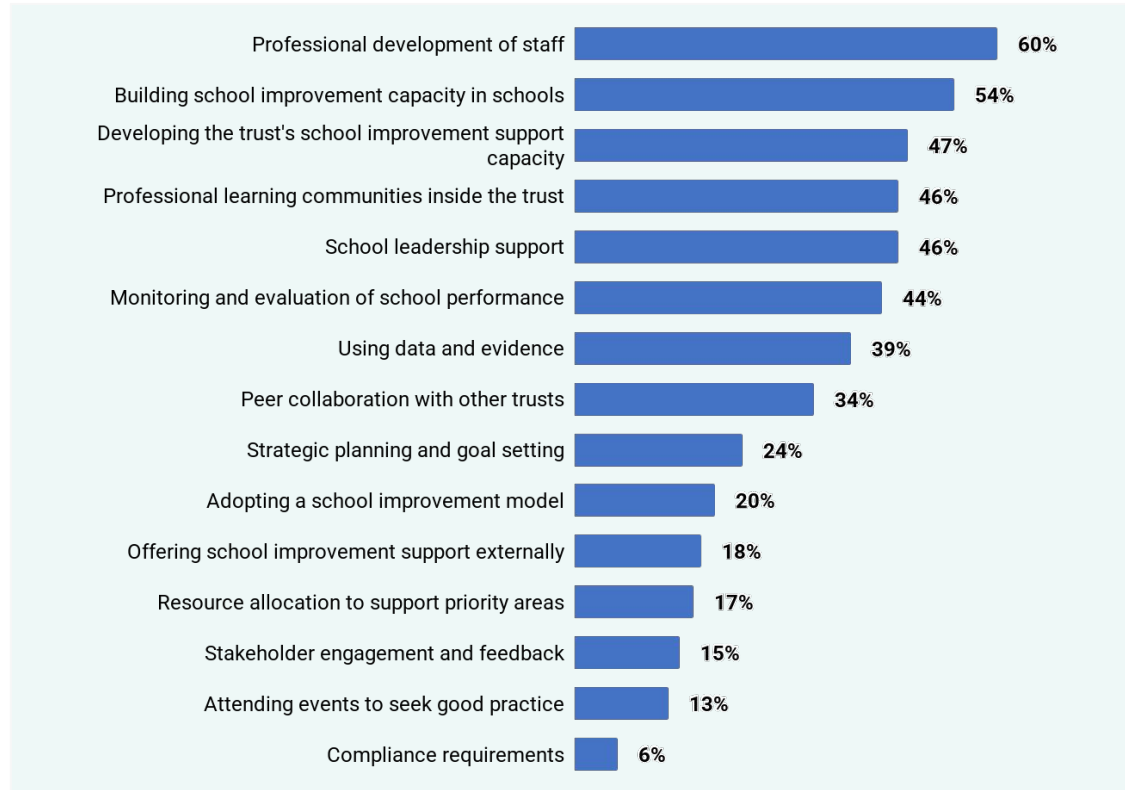
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Priorities

In which areas does your trust intend to focus its efforts on school improvement in the next academic year?



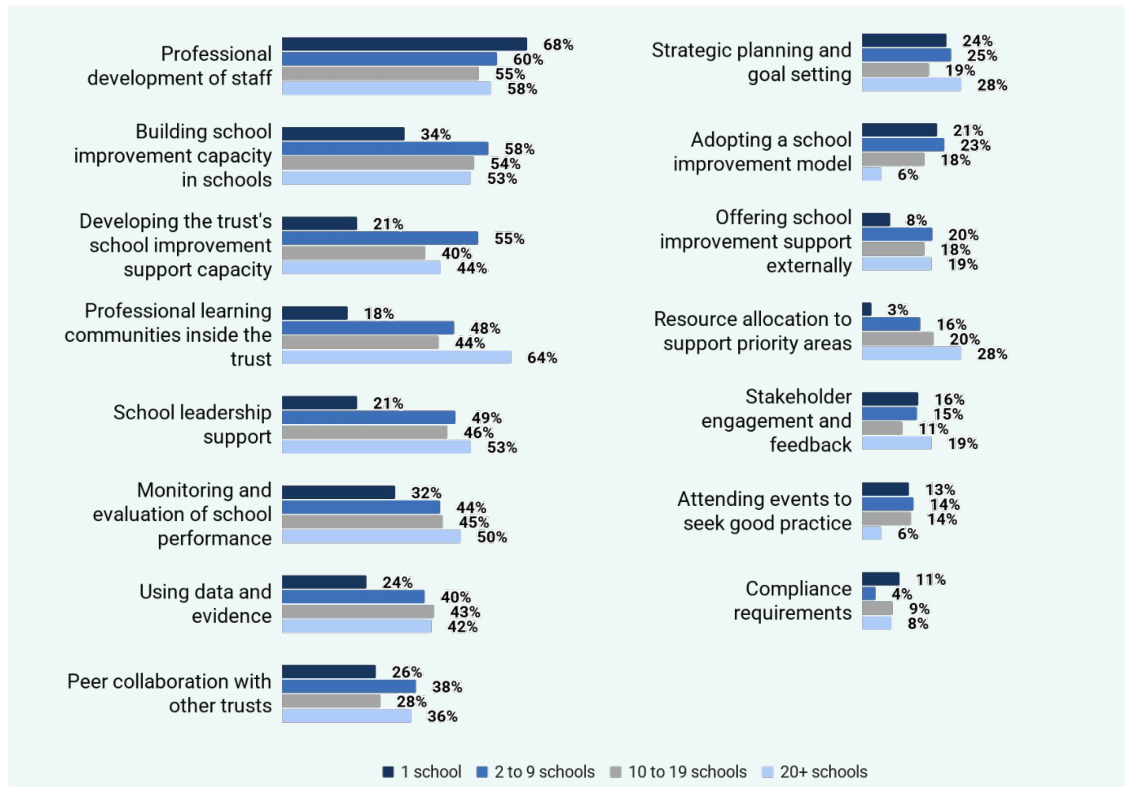
60% of CEOs highlighted professional development of staff, and 54% highlighted their desire to build school improvement capacity in schools



These are followed by a range of initiatives including the trust's support capacity, professional learning communities, and school leadership support

In which areas does your trust intend to focus its efforts on school improvement in the next academic year?

By trust size



- Professional development of staff is a priority across all trust sizes
- Larger trusts are more likely to focus their efforts on professional learning communities inside the trust than smaller trusts
- Trusts of between 2 and 9 schools are most likely to be investing their efforts in developing school improvement capacity, both in the schools and the trust
- Using data and evidence as well as monitoring and evaluation of school performance, are slightly more frequently mentioned by larger trusts

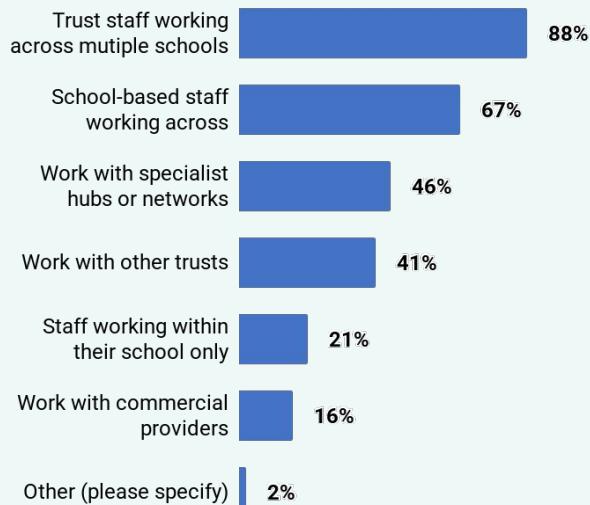
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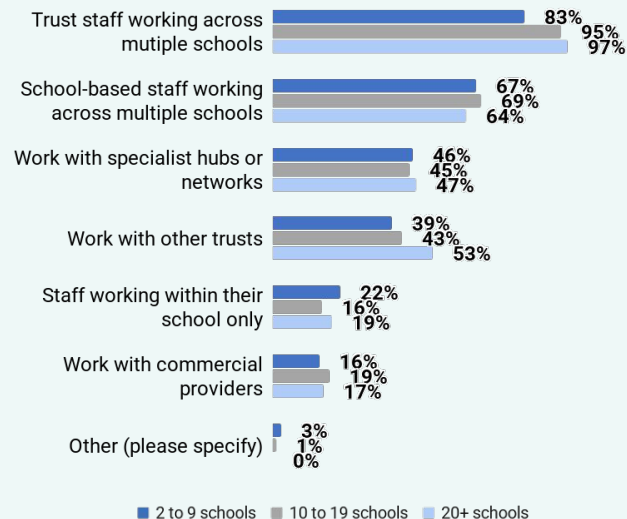
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Organisation

How is school improvement organised in your trust?

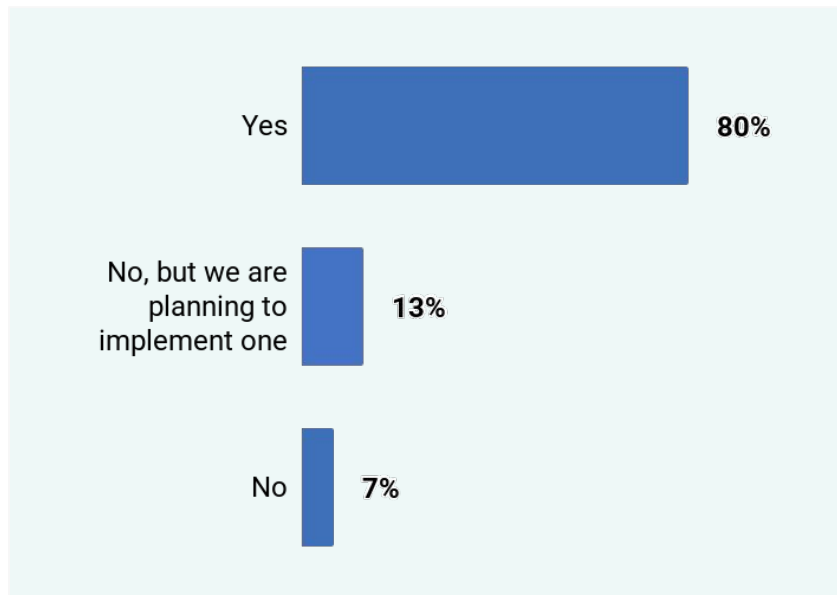


By trust size

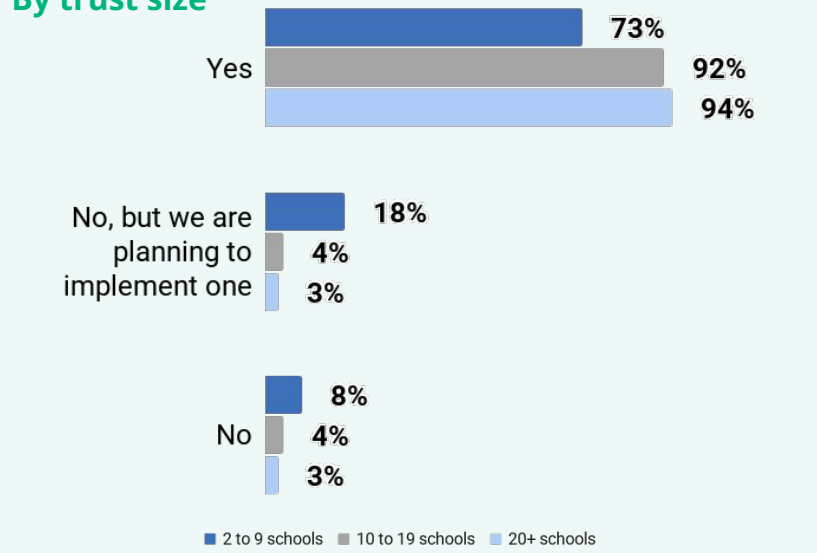


Trust CEOs report that their school improvement is most frequently organised around trust staff working across multiple schools (88%) or school-based staff working across multiple schools (67%). These models are far more frequently reported than external collaborations with other trusts, networks or commercial providers.

Do you have a trust-wide model of school improvement?

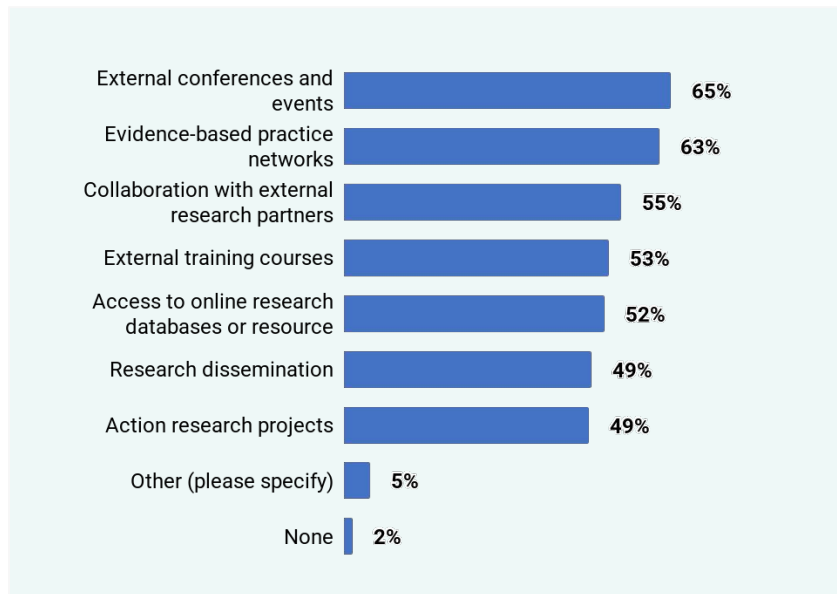


By trust size

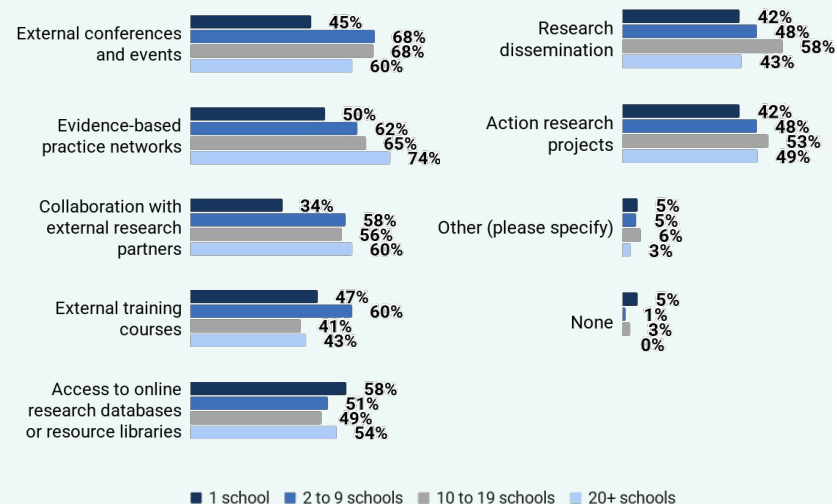


- 80% of CEOs report having a trust-wide model of school improvement. Only 7% of CEOs reported not having one and not planning to implement one.
- When it comes to experience by trust size, smaller trusts are less likely to have a trust wide model of school improvement.

How does the trust support teachers and leaders to make effective use of evidence & research?



By trust size



A large part of dynamic school improvement at scale is the use of evidence and research in decision-making at every level of the trust and school decision-making systems. The most frequent way trusts support teachers and leaders to do this is through supporting their teams to attend external conferences and events, followed by evidence-based practice networks but a wide range of activities are carried out by most trusts.

Larger trusts were more likely to report using evidence-based practice networks.

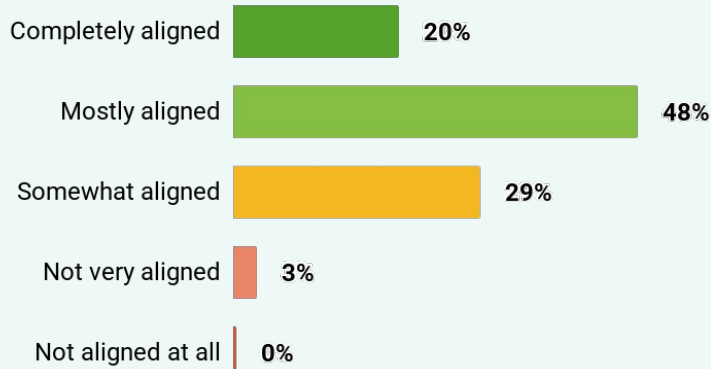
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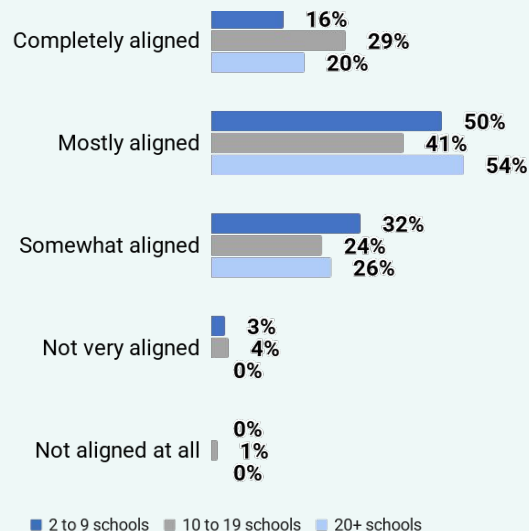
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Alignment

How far are your school improvement plans aligned across the trust?

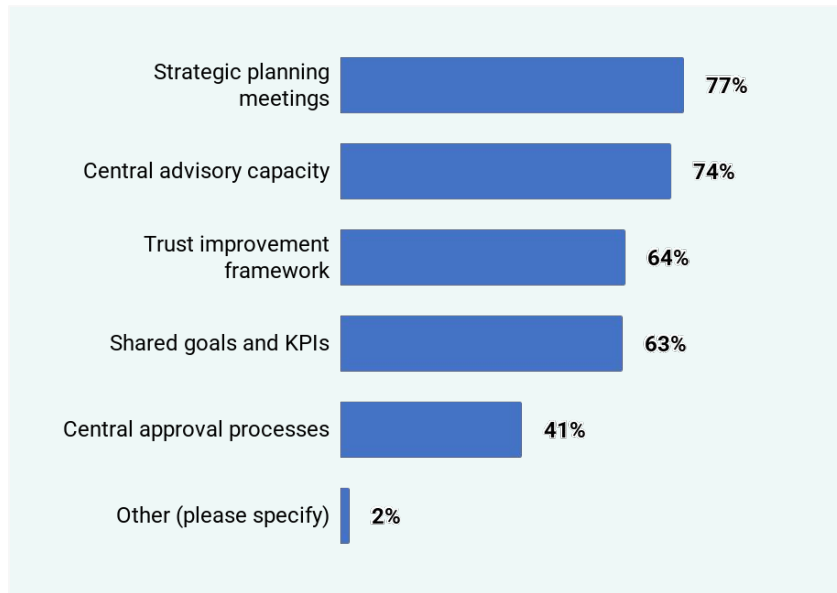


By trust size

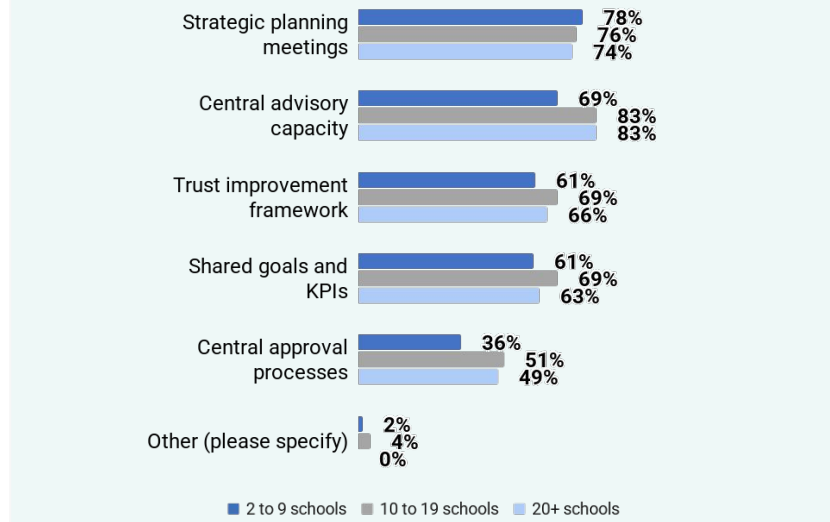


20% of CEOs reported that their school improvement plans aligned across the trust “completely”. 48% reported that their school improvement plan was “mostly aligned” with their trust. Only 3% of Trust CEOs reported that their school improvement plans were “not very aligned” or “not aligned at all” across their trust.

What processes does your trust use to align school improvement plans across the trust?



By trust size



77% highlighted that they use strategic planning meetings, while 74% said they use central advisory capacity. A trust improvement framework and shared goals and KPIs were also selected by over 60% of respondents

Small trusts are less likely to set central approval processes compared to larger trusts.

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Conclusion

Steve Rollett, Deputy Chief Executive, CST



This survey focuses on what trusts are doing, but increasingly we find that what they stop doing is just as important - honing in on the things that matter helps both school improvement and workforce resilience and culture.

These findings also support what we know about the sector's fantastic capacity for sharing and working together.

Our School Improvement Conference and our professional communities are full of people hungry to improve, and to share their experiences, and this coming together is immensely powerful.

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