

Candidate Pack

Principal

Robert Blake Academy

Robert Blake Academy
The best in everyone™
Part of United Learning



Welcome

Thank you very much for your interest in becoming the next Principal of Robert Blake Academy.

Robert Blake Academy is at a pivotal moment in its history. Serving more than 1,000 pupils in Bridgwater, Somerset, the school has a strong foundation, a committed staff team and an ambitious vision centred on high expectations, aspiration and belonging. Having very recently joined United Learning, Robert Blake Academy is beginning an exciting new chapter. While the school has not yet achieved the outcomes its pupils deserve, improvements are firmly underway and, with the support, expertise and proven track record of the Trust, we are confident it can rapidly become a strong, community-centred school.

We are now seeking an exceptional Principal to lead that journey. This is a rare opportunity to shape the future of a school with significant untapped potential, building a culture of excellence in teaching, behaviour and achievement while inspiring confidence across the whole community. We are looking for a leader with the vision, ambition and determination to unlock the very best in Robert Blake Academy and ensure every pupil receives the education they deserve.

United Learning is a big group of schools – with over 75,000 pupils and more than 10,000 staff – so we have the capacity to support you educationally and operationally. At the same time, we are values-led and base all that we do on good relationships. Reporting directly to the Regional Director, you will be supported both personally and professionally, benefitting from the strength of a national Group who will support your development and that of your staff and school.

We are committed to fairness, diversity and inclusion. We are currently working hard to improve representation of black, Asian and minority ethnic leaders at headship level and to raise our proportion of women leaders to match their representation in our wider workforce. Whoever you are, if you have a strong track record of improving young people's education and a drive to do more, we very much look forward to hearing from you.

With best wishes,

Jon Coles

Sir Jon Coles, Chief Executive

The Academy

Robert Blake Academy is a thriving and ambitious 11-16 secondary school at the heart of Bridgwater, one of Somerset's fastest-growing towns. Serving more than 1,000 pupils from Bridgwater and the surrounding communities, the school occupies a vital role in the lives of local families and is driven by a shared belief that every young person deserves the opportunity to succeed.

At the heart of the school's work is a clear vision: **Excellence in Learning, Strength in Character**. Its mission is equally ambitious: to be **a school of ambition and excellence, character and belonging**, where every pupil is known, valued and challenged to achieve their very best. These aspirations are underpinned by the school's SMART values of **Self-discipline, Motivation, Aspiration, Respect and Togetherness**, which shape the culture of the school and guide the experiences of pupils and staff alike.

Excellence in Learning means ensuring that all pupils experience and benefit from consistently high-quality teaching, delivered through an ambitious curriculum and inclusive classroom practice. The school's commitment is that every learner, regardless of background or need, is able to make strong progress and fulfil their potential. Ambition at Robert Blake Academy extends far beyond examination results. Pupils benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum, a growing range of enrichment opportunities and a strong focus on personal development, equipping them with the knowledge, skills and confidence to thrive in an ever-changing world.

Equally important is the school's commitment to Strength in Character. Robert Blake Academy is building a culture of aspiration, belonging and personal responsibility, where pupils develop strong character and demonstrate excellent behaviour. Through high expectations, strong relationships and meaningful opportunities to contribute to school life, pupils are encouraged to become resilient, responsible and aspirational young people. Staff also thrive within a culture of professional excellence, where collaboration, development and continuous improvement are valued and supported.

There is much to celebrate. The school benefits from modern facilities, a dedicated and talented staff team, supportive families and a community that is proud of its young people. Recent years have seen considerable improvements in behaviour, personal development and the overall culture of the school, laying strong foundations for future success. Pupils are increasingly engaged in wider opportunities, leadership roles, careers education and enrichment activities that broaden horizons, strengthen character and raise aspirations.

At the same time, Robert Blake Academy is honest about the challenges it faces. While significant progress has been made, outcomes have not yet consistently reflected the potential of its pupils. The next stage of the school's journey requires a relentless focus on securing exceptional standards of teaching, learning, attendance and achievement so that every pupil can experience the high-quality education they deserve. This is a school with untapped potential, a clear sense of purpose and a community ready to embrace transformation.

Having recently become part of United Learning, Robert Blake Academy is embarking on an exciting new chapter in its history. This partnership brings access to extensive school improvement expertise, high-quality professional development, proven educational approaches and a powerful network of support. Together, these provide a unique platform from which to accelerate improvement and realise the school's vision of Excellence in Learning, Strength in Character, establishing Robert Blake Academy as a beacon of educational excellence across Somerset.

The successful Principal will join the school at a pivotal moment and will have the rare opportunity to shape its future direction and lasting legacy. We are seeking an exceptional leader with the vision, courage and determination to turn ambition into reality, building upon the school's strengths and leading a culture where excellence is the norm. They will inspire pupils and staff alike, champion the school's mission of ambition, excellence, character and belonging, and ensure that every member of the school community is empowered to thrive and flourish.

For an ambitious and values-driven school leader, this represents a truly outstanding opportunity: to transform outcomes, strengthen character, inspire a generation of young people and establish Robert Blake Academy as one of Somerset's leading secondary schools, recognised for both the excellence of its education and the strength of its community.

To arrange a visit to the school or for a conversation, contact Michelle Dyer, Regional Director at **michelle.dyer@unitedlearning.org.uk**


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About United Learning

United Learning is a group of schools which aims to provide excellent education to children and young people across the country. We seek to improve the life chances of all the children and young people we serve and make it our mission to bring out 'the best in everyone' – pupils, staff, parents, and the wider community. We uniquely comprise schools in both the state and the independent sectors.

As a Group, we can offer more to both staff and young people than any single school could offer alone. The growing range of outstanding group-wide activities that we can provide will mean that more young people will have truly exceptional and inspiring experiences.

We believe that our Group contains the most developed relationships and practical interaction between independent and state schools in the country, creating benefits for all the schools involved.

United Learning comprises both United Church Schools Trust, which operates our fee-paying independent schools, and United Learning Trust, which operates our state-funded academies.

To find out more about United Learning, please visit the website www.unitedlearning.org.uk

As part of United Learning, Robert Blake Academy will share the objective of bringing out 'the best in everyone', enabling each pupil to become a balanced, happy and articulate person with intellectual freedom, confidence, compassion, integrity and a lifelong love of learning.



Our Ethos

Our approach to education is underpinned by a sense of moral purpose and commitment to doing what is right for children and young people. We believe in supporting our colleagues to achieve excellence and in acting with integrity in all our dealings within and beyond the Group. We believe the safety and welfare of all children and young people is paramount. We summarise this ethos as 'the best in everyone' which underpins our core values:

Ambition – to achieve the best for us and others.

Confidence – to have the courage of our convictions and to take risks for the right cause.

Creativity – to imagine possibilities and make them real.

Respect – of ourselves and others in all that we do.

Enthusiasm – to seek opportunity, find what is good and pursue talents and interests.

Determination – to overcome obstacles and achieve success.

As a single organisation, we seek to bring together the best of independent and state sectors, respecting both traditions and learning from each other. We believe that each of our schools is and should be distinctive – committed to developing its own strengths and identity while sharing our core values to promote service, compassion and generosity.

Continuing Professional Development

We believe that successful organisations make a priority of developing their staff; all the more so in education, where the people of the organisation are its most important asset. While the development of all staff is important, we make the support and professional development of Heads and senior leaders a particular priority, given the impact that leaders have on the life of staff and pupils alike.

We work on the basis that each of us, however effective, can always improve. The successful candidate of Robert Blake Academy will be set personal development objectives with the Regional Director each year and will be supported to achieve them.

The Principal will also be asked to take a role in supporting the leadership of the whole organisation, working with other Heads in the Group, and sharing ideas and practice with one another.
They will also have the benefit of accessing a range of networks, including the Group Education Forum, which brings together Heads from across the Group six times a year. United Learning are passionate about staff development, for example we provide 360-degree feedback as part of professional development, and we have also commissioned training programmes from major universities.

We believe that schools are at their best when they are autonomous and able to develop a distinctive ethos, reflecting the needs of their pupils and the context within which they work. The Group can get behind the work of Heads and leaders in schools through creating strong networks, providing outstanding educational support and professional development, and by taking the strain of professional functional support. We aim to ensure that the technology, finance, HR and data support is provided more effectively and efficiently than would otherwise be possible, so that Principals can focus on educational leadership.

The newly appointed Principal at Robert Blake Academy will also benefit from a comprehensive induction programme which has recently been reviewed to ensure it is effective and to promote success.

Our Framework for Excellence

To achieve our mission, our schools prioritise five key principles:

1. **The best from everyone**
2. **Powerful knowledge**
3. **Education with character**
4. **Leadership in every role**
5. **Continuous improvement**

> Our aim is to bring out 'the best in everyone'. So, we must expect the best from everyone, all the time. Every child is a special individual, capable of extraordinary things. Who can know the limits of any child's potential?

Our Framework for Excellence

'The best from everyone'

Our aim is to bring out 'the best in everyone'. So, we must expect the best from everyone, all the time. Every child is a special individual, capable of extraordinary things. Who can know the limits of any child's potential? So, we expect unreasonably – we constantly challenge children to do what they think they can't, to persist, to work hard and to be at their best.

From every adult we expect the same: that they are at their best, expect unreasonably of themselves, are determined and resilient and pass those expectations on to the children in all they do. We act with the utmost love, care and good faith – the highest standards come with the greatest attention to the wellbeing of all.

'Powerful knowledge'

Our most important purpose is to teach young people things they would not learn outside school, which free them to think and act more powerfully in their lives. Words and numbers are our most powerful ways of representing the world. Mastery of language and fluent mathematical skills are therefore our top priority. We aim to prepare young people to make a success of their lives: a core entitlement to subject-based learning; the development of talents; an understanding of work and society.

Worthwhile learning is often hard. Inspiring teaching is what gives access to difficult concepts and the thrill of intellectual discovery. Powerful knowledge is not static or backward-looking. It includes the ability to critique, challenge the status quo, think and learn.

'Education with character'

Academic success is very important. Exam passes are an important aspect of that. But there is more to a good education. Our schools also aim to develop character, compassion and service. Young people are expected to contribute to their school and to society; to try things which they think they cannot do; to persist in the face of difficulty; to become resilient in overcoming obstacles; to manage themselves; to work independently on things which challenge them; to work with others and in teams; to be courageous and caring; to lead.
We want young people to look back on a joyful schooling which has inspired and challenged them, given them wide opportunity and prepared them for the ups and downs of life.

'Leadership in every role'

Our children are leaders of the future. We expect them to start today – taking advantage of structured opportunities to lead and taking responsibility for themselves and others. Every adult in the school is a leader. In every word, tone and gesture, they set direction and expectation. We expect every adult to take responsibility and the initiative to do what is right for the children.

All those in formal leadership positions create the climate in which others work. They demand the highest standards, build a performance culture, develop their teams and create the space for others to lead. All leaders listen, grow relationships, act with integrity and care and expect the best from themselves and others in building a happy, confident school.

'Continuous improvement'

However good we are, we can be better. We constantly look for improvements and implement them with pace. We look for ideas for improvement inside the organisation and out; we observe one another; we steal good ideas with pride and look to make them better; we work together to improve.

We always look at the evidence and are rigorous in evaluating impact. We stop or change things which aren't working; we improve things which are. We aim for high leverage, high impact for low effort and low cost. We constantly look to have more impact for less cost and effort and to spend every pound wisely.

Job Description

The Principal will lead and inspire excellence throughout the Academy. They will work with all staff to ensure success for all pupils at every stage of their education and provide them with the skills and confidence in their future life and work.

As a senior leader within United Learning, the Principal, together with the Local Governing Body (LGB), will be responsible for establishing and implementing the vision and direction for all staff and pupils throughout the school. In leading the school, the Principal will ensure that United Learning's ethos and values are deeply embedded and visible, securing 'the best in everyone' for all stakeholders.

Broadly, the responsibilities of the role are as detailed below:

Educational Leadership and Management

- Ensuring excellent academic outcomes in all key stages;
- Developing outstanding teaching and learning for all pupils;
- Embedding an aspirational and innovative culture of learning;
- Implementing a rigorous system of monitoring to evaluate the work of the school;
- Securing and maintaining high standards across the whole school;
- Embedding a fulfilling and enriching curriculum for all children;
- Setting and achieving aspirational targets for all pupils that ensure rapid progress to become an outstanding school;
- Ensuring the welfare and safety of all pupils from all groups, including their safeguarding.

Strategic Leadership and Management

- Leading the implementation of The United Learning Way, which outlines the guiding educational principles of our Trust, throughout Robert Blake Academy.
- Defining and delivering the vision and objectives of the school and the School Strategic Plan as agreed with the LGB and the Regional Director;
- Leading the school in partnership with the LGB and United Learning senior leaders;
- Developing and maintaining the values of United Learning within the school;
- Contributing professionally to the broader United Learning agenda.

Job Description

People Leadership and Management

- Leading on all staffing issues, including the appointment and development of staff;
- Ensuring a culture of working together to achieve high standards throughout the school;
- Promoting staff well-being within the Framework for Excellence;
- Managing performance and ensuring that staff receive appropriate support in order to achieve excellence;
- Leading reflective practice and inspirational professional development that enables all members of staff to flourish;
- Promoting equality and fairness for all staff;
- Taking responsibility for one's own professional development as the Principal.

Financial and Business Management

- Working closely with the Business Manager and finance colleagues to ensure budgets are set and managed within guidelines agreed with the LGB and the Group through the Regional Director and Chief Financial Officer;
- Monitoring actual spending against budget;
- Monitoring and evaluating the impact of funding to support the progress and achievement of priority groups including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, or those eligible for pupil premium funding;
- Implementing key Group-wide policies and strategies (e.g. in relation to Compliance, Finance, HR and Technology);
- Ensuring that efficient administrative systems are implemented and managed;
- Managing, maintaining and utilising the site and facilities to their full value to the Academy, the Group and the community;
- Ensuring that health and safety and safeguarding policies are managed and implemented.

Links with Community and Business

- Developing strong and effective partnerships with parents;
- Developing a thriving sense of school community to include present and past pupils and parents;
- Creating proactive, entrepreneurial and effective links with the wider community;
- Making a strategic contribution to the development of the Group;
- Developing strong and effective partnerships with local primary schools, colleges and universities;
- Ensuring that the school contributes to United Learning cluster initiatives.

Reporting

- The Principal of Robert Blake Academy reports to the Regional Director who reports to the National Director of Secondary Education of United Learning, who is responsible to the overarching Charity Board through the Chief Executive.
- The LGB, and its Chair in particular, will also work closely with the Principal in relation to its responsibilities to act as a 'critical friend' to the school. This relationship with the Chair and LGB will be key to driving the school forward and further developing local partnerships.
- The Principal will keep the Regional Director fully informed on the progress of the school and will submit reports for consideration as appropriate. The Principal will participate in an annual performance review as part of the agreed appraisal process.

Person Specification

Education and Training

- Educational and professional qualifications appropriate for the role of Principal of the school. Such qualifications would normally include a degree from a recognised university, professional qualifications (for example PGCE) and ideally a further post graduate qualification;
- Evidence of professional development across career to date.

Experience

- Demonstrable success in a leadership role in a comparable organisation and through significant periods of development;
- A proven track record of securing excellence in an educational establishment;
- A proven track record in rapidly raising pupils' achievements;
- Evidence of the ability to develop excellent relationships with staff, members of the local community, parents and pupils (across key stages);
- Experience in leading and developing colleagues and effective teams.

Knowledge, Skills and Qualities

- An in-depth understanding of school leadership and school improvement needed to achieve outstanding pupil progress and personal development;
- The ability to create and implement effective management systems in which roles, responsibilities and accountabilities are clearly articulated;
- An understanding of the importance of research in developing approaches to learning and curriculum design and the ability to put this into practice;
- An understanding of expectations of all phases of education, from early years through to Post-16;
- A thorough understanding of school markets, the analysis required to develop those and the skills to implement successful marketing strategies.

Personal Qualities

- A clear understanding of and commitment to the development of the United Learning values, the United Learning Way, and the Framework for Excellence;
- Belief in equality of opportunities for all pupils and staff regardless of culture, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or religious identity;
- Clarity of vision with the ability to communicate it in a compelling and engaging way;
- An adaptable leadership style which encourages leadership from others and celebrates success;
- Determination and resilience;
- Sensitivity and wisdom in managing relationships with pupils, parents and staff;
- High level interpersonal and communication skills with the capacity to influence at all levels;
- High expectations of pupil achievement, conduct and behaviour;
- A commitment to collaborative working, both within the school and across the Group;
- Openness, sense of humour, energy and enthusiasm.

Terms & Conditions of Employment

Employer
United Learning

Position
Principal, Robert Blake Academy with responsibility for the whole school

Reporting Line
Regional Director, Secondary Academies

Location
Robert Blake Academy or such other nearby place operated by the school or to which the school may relocate.

Start Date
April 2027

Starting Salary
The salary will be commensurate with the significance and importance of the post and the experience of the successful candidate.

Holidays
You are entitled to take holidays during the normal school holidays except where your presence is required for proper execution of your duties as Principal. United Learning would expect you would not have less than six weeks of the year without any work involvement.

Teachers' Pension Scheme
The Principal is eligible to be a member of the TPS.

Health Insurance
The Principal is eligible to be a member of United Learning's medical insurance scheme, currently with BUPA. It is also possible for other family members to be included within the policy but, when this happens, there is a charge.

Ill Health
United Learning's sick leave and pay policy will apply. The policy allows for a three years' sliding qualification period, at the end of which you will be entitled to full pay for 100 working days and half pay for 100 working days.

Relocation
Assistance with relocation is negotiable and may be available up to a maximum of £8,000 on the basis of receipts relating to actual relevant expenditure.

Safeguarding
United Learning is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and expects all staff to share this commitment. This appointment will be subject to an enhanced DBS Check, medical clearance, online checks and employment references, all of which are satisfactory to United Learning.

Benefits
We encourage flexible working and offer opportunities where it meets the needs of the role. We also have a wide range of benefits, including a Health Cash Plan which gives you money back on essential healthcare, discount schemes that save you money, as well as access to an Employee Assistance Programme, discounted gym memberships, cycle purchase and car leasing.

The final detailed terms and conditions are subject to agreement between United Learning and the successful candidate and will be reflected in the formal employment contract.

How to Apply

To arrange a visit to the school or for a confidential conversation, please contact Michelle Dyer, Regional Director at michelle.dyer@unitedlearning.org.uk

Applications should be submitted via our website:
unitedlearning.org.uk/careers/current-vacancies

The closing date for receipt of completed applications is 9am on Wednesday 2 December 2026.

The Selection Process

We will treat all enquiries, formal and informal, in confidence. The selection process will be as follows:

All applications will be acknowledged by email. If you have not received acknowledgement that your application has been received within two working days of sending it, please contact philippa.beckett@unitedlearning.org.uk

Shortlisting will take place on Friday 4 December.

The selection process will take place on **Friday 11 December** and **Tuesday 15 December** at Robert Blake Academy. You do need to be available for both dates.

Candidates will be offered full feedback on their application and/or interview.

United Learning's normal terms and conditions of employment apply for the position of Principal. The final detailed terms and conditions are subject to agreement between United Learning and the successful candidate and will be reflected in the formal employment contract.



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