work collaborative

Maritime Academy Trust

NETS AND ANCHORS / CASE STUDY

Maritime Academy Trust

Build trust with families from the very start, and create a dedicated, non-teaching role so the work doesn't fall on teachers' shoulders.



Illustrative image (AI-generated), not this setting.

work collaborative

Maritime Academy Trust

At a glance

School group

Maritime Academy Trust, with the Maritime Children's Foundation (the Trust's charity)

Place

Kent and south-east London

Phase

Primary, including early years

Key partners

Reach Foundation, families, local community organisations

Contributor

Susan Matheson, Chief Operating Officer

Case-study focus

Home visits and Community Ambassadors

Anchored in place

Understanding the school context. Maritime's ambition is that every child gets a great start in life. They think big with their Big Hairy Audacious Goals, to which community engagement is integral. Leaders knew that when trust between home and school is low, even well-designed support fails to take root. Inspired by Reach Foundation's cradle-to-career work, the Trust decided to understand families by meeting them on their own ground. Universal home visits, piloted at Bligh Primary School in Strood and two other schools in 2022, now run in every Maritime school: a teacher and a second adult visit every family before term begins. For most schools in the Trust this takes place for every child each year, with one school that focuses on Early Years and new pupils only.

Maritime Academy Trust

Working in partnership. Maritime accessed support and training from The Reach Foundation, which shaped its starting point: home visits first, then capacity to connect with local assets. The Trust set up the Maritime Children's Foundation so it could apply for grants that no single school could. The Trust's Community Ambassadors run coffee mornings and build links with local organisations, and Maritime values the ripple effect. At times it felt like it was hard to build but they realised building trust takes time and one parent at a coffee morning can bring others.

The net: building capacity together

Teachers were the obvious people to connect with communities as they know the children well, but they are also the people with the role and skill to teach. So Maritime created a Community Ambassador in each school: a non-teaching role of around 15 hours a week, focused on connecting with families and the local community. This protects teacher workload whilst providing capacity to link with the community and include teachers in a way that is appropriate to their role. Teachers own the relationship with their class's families; ambassadors widen the circle, and both share an understanding of why this matters. Ambassadors are managed centrally by the Trust's Head of Community Engagement, which gives them a professional community across eleven schools.

The vision for this work runs through the whole organisation, from trustees and the CEO through to the families the schools serve.

What is in place

Around 4,000 home visits every autumn across all year groups; a Community Ambassador in every school; a Trust charity able to apply for grants; parent-infant groups through the Strong Foundations programme that started in one school and now takes place across nearly all Maritime schools.

The difference it is making

At Bligh, relationships with parents are more open, parents' evenings are more productive, and children arrive on day one more settled, supporting attendance and readiness to learn. An unexpected benefit is recruitment: candidates are drawn to a school that knows its community so well.

Maritime Academy Trust

The ambassador model works very well in nearly all the schools. An early years programme runs in most schools, and a SEND programme is due to follow.

Challenges and lessons learned

Home visits. The first year was the hardest. Implementing the home visit programme meant delaying the start of term, and some staff found the visits emotionally demanding. The visits remain demanding at times, seeing children grow up in conditions that continue to shock our staff.

Community Ambassadors. The headteacher's backing was essential. Where heads understood why the work mattered and could cascade that "why" through their school, to staff and families, it created real leverage and the work had far greater impact. There was also an understanding that deep, sustainable results would come over years, not terms.

How they made it possible

First step: piloting home visits in three schools before rolling them out across the Trust.

Capacity: a 15-hour Community Ambassador role in each school, managed centrally by a Head of Community Engagement, and funded through the charity with seed funding and Reach support.

Partners: the Reach Foundation shaped the approach; the charity opened up grants no single school could access.

What we wish we'd known at the start

Be patient: the impact builds over years; even one parent at a coffee morning can start a ripple.

Maritime Academy Trust

In your setting

School context: Whose threshold does our first conversation with a family happen on?

Working in partnership: What could a school group, charity or partner make possible that no single school could?

Building capacity together: Who holds the relationship with families, and does cover keep pulling them away?

Learning from others and applying to our context: Who can help us shape our approach? How can we make it work for us?

Thinking big for long-term impact: How can you use the freedoms of being in a school group to do ambitious, longer-term work?

"When trust is low, even well-designed academic support can fail to take root."

Bligh Primary School

Full paper and supporting sources

workcollaborative.com/nets-and-anchors/