

Future Directions Working Group: Stage 1 Decision Note

1. Executive Summary

The Governing Body (GB) and Senior Leadership Team (SLT) are obliged to set a strategic direction that is in the best interest of the school taking into consideration internal factors (school vision, culture, structure, performance and financial management) and external factors (local and national educational and political landscapes, funding). As part of exercising this responsibility, a joint “Future Directions” working group was established by the GB in Dec 17 to investigate alternative models for the way the school could be structured and funded. This working group aimed to take an objective and open-minded perspective, developing and following a clear and transparent decision making process. It was noted that while the school may be able to influence or manage internal factors, there are external factors that are largely outside our control and subject to significant change and uncertainty.

Options were assessed on the basis of their ability to impact three key ongoing challenges the group has identified for Sherington:

- Financial sustainability & stability
- Recruitment, retention and development of high quality staff
- Sustainable school model in a changing environment

Each option also had to meet the following minimum requirements in order to be considered further:

- Aligns with Sherington values & culture
- Retains Sherington’s identity
- Based on local relationships
- Has clear net benefits (not net drain) for school resources (financial, premises and staff) and for pupils. Advances the school in some way.

The working group has followed a staged decision process, described in the Introduction below. This Decision Note for Stage 1 describes how a review of a range of options for the future strategic direction and structure of Sherington Primary School concluded that the three key challenges identified for Sherington might be met most effectively by either joining a MAT or remaining as a standalone state-maintained school. The review drew on informal discussions with local MATs and the LA, as well as on the personal experiences of the SLT in academisation, and wider research by the GB and SLT.

2. Introduction

Strategic leadership is one of the three core functions of governance, and a key element in the role and responsibilities of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). The governing body (GB) is obliged to consider what is in the school’s best interests for the future. Making a decision on the future direction for Sherington is complex and needs to consider both internal factors (school vision, culture, structure, performance and finance) and external factors (local and national educational and political landscapes). While the school may be able to influence or manage internal factors, the external factors are largely outside our control and subject to

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significant change and uncertainty. A joint “Future Directions” working group was established by the GB in Dec 17 to review alternative models for the way the school could be structured and funded; made up of governors (Kate Parker, Jon Bennett, Ross Bailey and Sarah Mirza) and the Senior Leadership Team (Karen Dennett, Amanda Burnell, Gail Tippett and Dan O’Leary). The working group identified the following as key ongoing challenges for Sherington (the first two are in the top 3 challenges identified by The Key for 2017/18 across all schools in England, whether maintained, multi-academy trust (MAT) or single academies):

- Financial sustainability & stability
- Recruitment, retention and development of high quality staff
- Sustainable school model in a changing environment

This decision framework is intended to provide a clear and transparent process for the SLT & GB to combine and integrate the knowledge and experience we have gathered through a period of exploration that has included background research on teaching schools and MATs, social network analysis of the development of local MATs, and meeting with leaders and participants in three different MATs operating in the local area. The framework will allow us to compare options and plot a pathway towards a decision.

The framework allows the decision to be taken in several stages, with an increasing level of detail at each stage:

Stage 1: Options that will not further Sherington’s strategic priorities are eliminated

Stage 2: Remaining options reviewed in more detail

Stage 3: More detailed review of shortlisted proposals and decision on way forward.

An engagement process with the wider community will also be initiated as part of Stage 3. Further due diligence work and financial modelling/scenario planning will be required following Stage 3.

This report covers Stage 1 and sets out the parameters for Stage 2.

Definitions and further information on MAT structure is provided at the end of this document.

3. Context

The context for this decision is:

- **Funding:** while the cash amount going to schools in England is rising, the funding per pupil is set to fall by 8% in real terms between 2014 and 2020 as a result of school specific inflation. (<https://fullfact.org/education/spending-schools-2020/>). Sherington’s income in 2019/20 is currently forecast to be 6% lower than it was in 2015/16.
- **RBG:** 15 primary schools are academies (plus 1 in process of conversion), 61 are maintained. 10 secondary schools (plus 1 in process of conversion) are academies, 5 are maintained. 2 special schools are academies, 3 are maintained. Most primary school academisation has happened in the last few years, and formation and growth

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of MATs may continue. This together with the loss of the Education Services Grants, risks an erosion of funding for LA education services; and a change in the role of the LA, although the LA retains overarching responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children and young people in their area.

- **Academisation programme:** while the forced academisation proposed in 2016 has been dropped, there is a drive for schools to be working in partnerships of some form. It is possible that there will be a general drift towards MATs as the default model for education as a response to the continued real term reduction in funding per pupil, although this reduction impacts upon all schools.

4. Framework & Decision Tree

The framework is structured as a decision tree, see next page. The first level of decisions are about the types of potential changes to school structure or role/relationships that are under consideration, Stage 1 of the process. The second level of decisions are about specific opportunities under each of the first level options, Stage 2 of the process. Those listed are for illustration.

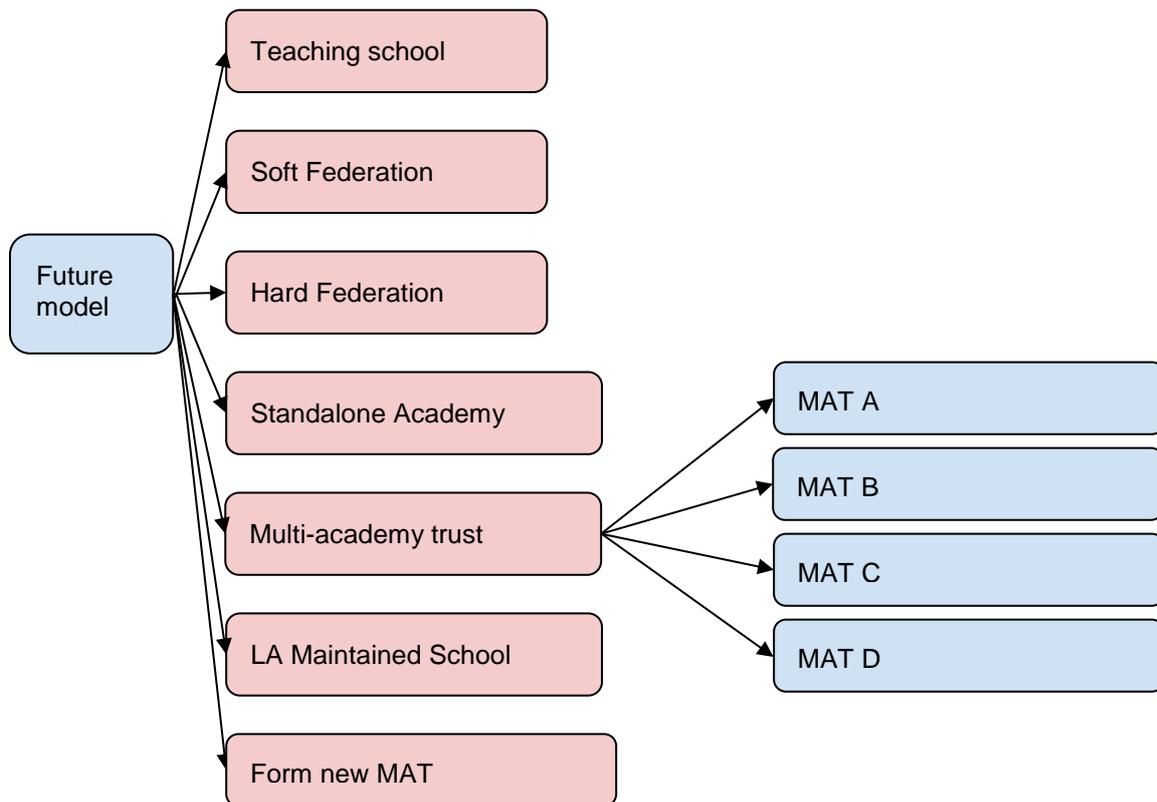
Each element of the decision tree was assessed against its ability to impact the challenges identified for Sherington. Each option also had to meet the following minimum requirements in order to be considered further:

- Aligns with Sherington values & culture
- Retains Sherington's identity
- Based on local relationships
- Has clear net benefits (not net drain) for school resources (financial, premises and staff) and for pupils. Advances the school in some way.

A one page summary for each level of the decision tree documents key opportunities and risks, and ability of each option to impact the challenges identified. RAG colour highlighting is used against each challenge and minimum requirement. Any models with a "red" rating against an element are unlikely to be pursued further.

During the process it became apparent that MATs are so diverse in character, approach and ethos that they cannot be treated as a single option. The summary page for MATS has therefore been completed in terms of criteria that the GB & SLT would need look for in considering any specific MAT. These criteria reflect the insights gained across all conversations with MATs so far, the experiences of members of the SLT in going through federation then academisation, and knowledge gained from background research. This will form the basis for Stage 2 of the decision process.

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The following summary tables cover the options laid out in Level 1 of the decision tree. The summary page for MATs has been completed in terms of criteria that the GB & SLT would need look for in considering any specific MAT.

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TEACHING SCHOOL	
Local Context	<p>RGTSA consists of 2 x teaching schools working with all schools in RBG. Being revamped/re-launched by co-chairs. Looking for people to take a lead as strategic partners. Difficult to match benefits to school with the time & money committed by schools. The extent of RBG support & commitment to this model is unclear.</p>
Impact on Challenges	<p>Financial stability Likely to add further financial demands to meet the criteria to become teaching school. Needs long term commitment from all parties to work, there is a risk that commitment may not be on equal term.</p>
	<p>Recruitment & retention Training & development opportunities, research projects NQT training A teaching school would be required to provide Initial Teacher Training (ITT) which goes much further than our current practice. Teaching schools are centres of excellence, taking a more focused role that prioritises:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • co-ordinating and providing high-quality school-led initial teacher training (ITT) • providing high-quality school-to-school support to spread excellent practice, particularly to schools that need it most • providing evidence-based professional and leadership development for teachers and leaders across their network
	<p>Sustainable school model in changing environment Risk of investing in model which may not have long term future. Involvement with RGTSA is possible without becoming a teaching school.</p>
Does it meet minimum criteria?	<p>Values Aligns with values - life-long learning. Aligns with our good track record in staff development. Becoming a Teaching School, we would need to extend the CPD offer that we currently offer in order to 'offer a range of evidence-based professional development opportunities for teachers and school support staff, extending your strong learning culture to schools you work with. These must build on initial teacher training and induction'</p>
	<p>Identity School retains independent character.</p>
	<p>Local Meeting criteria of supporting struggling school would most likely mean looking outside Greenwich.</p>
	<p>Net benefit Although grants are (currently) available, the financial incentive would need to be balanced against the increased capacity needed to deliver on the agenda set. This is particularly relevant in the provision of ITT and support to struggling schools.</p>

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SOFT FEDERATION/COLLABORATION	
Local Context	Compass MAT converted from a soft federation. Soft federation may or may not delegate authority from each GB to the joint committee.
Impact on Challenges	<p>Financial stability</p> <p>Some opportunity for sharing financial burden - efficiencies through sharing resources, and joint financial planning. However the relationship is not permanent - a school may leave the federation and result in the remaining schools having to shoulder any financial commitments they made towards a shared resource. Delegated authority of joint committee may limit financial integration, if GB is required to approve all joint committee decisions then the ability to respond to opportunities/risks could be limited. Federating is limited to 5 schools (unless permission sought from Secretary of State) - this will limit potential for financial savings.</p>
	<p>Recruitment, retention and development</p> <p>Opportunity to share staff across a federation. However staff employed by federation may feel less secure. Opportunity to employ staff between more than one school exists outside of federation model.</p>
	<p>Sustainable school model in changing environment</p> <p>Would need to build relationships with several schools to initiate federation. While collaboration between different school models is possible (eg maintained & academy or CTC), maintained schools cannot form formal joint committees with MATs or schools within a MAT. This will close down some local opportunities for Sherington, and will impact the level of commitment of collaborating schools.</p>
Does it meet minimum criteria?	<p>Values</p> <p>By definition, a federation would be a collaborative enterprise with like-minded schools towards shared objectives.</p>
	<p>Identity</p> <p>School would retain its own GB. Extent of collaboration is governed by Memorandum of Understanding.</p>
	<p>Local</p> <p>Still a large pool of local primaries to choose from, a much smaller pool of secondaries.</p>
	<p>Net benefit</p> <p>A federation might bring a net benefit, although with the risks described above, and possibly over a limited timescale.</p>

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HARD FEDERATION	
Local Context	<p>NGA are promoting hard federations as a step towards MATs (from perspective of forming a new MAT), or for situations where relationship with LA is strong - federation remains under LA control.</p> <p>St Mary Magdalene CofE and Christ Church CofE have transitioned into a hard federation model from a soft one. They are located over 4 sites. The St Mary Magdalene Peninsula site has primary & secondary phase. The single GB currently has 2 co-chairs and 2 vice chairs.</p> <p>A hard federation enabled an increase in the number of places and was therefore supported by LA.</p>
Impact on Challenges	<p>Financial stability</p> <p>All land, property, liabilities, rights and funds transferred to joint GB on federation. Joint GB has option to pool funding for all schools in federation. Schools may still leave federation, but the arrangement is much stronger with a higher level of commitment. Potential for savings limited by small number of schools typically in a federation (limited to 5 schools by regulations).</p> <p>LA brokering role would likely drive towards federating with a school needing improvement. This may also come with financial liabilities.</p>
	<p>Recruitment, retention & development</p> <p>Opportunity to employ staff as a federation, easier to move staff around federation schools. However staff employed by federation may feel less secure. Opportunity to employ staff between more than one school exists outside of federation model. Common view on CPD.</p>
	<p>Sustainable school model in changing environment</p> <p>Would need to build relationships with several schools to initiate federation. Schools cannot form federations with MATs or schools within a MAT. This will close down some local opportunities for Sherington, and may impact the likelihood of other schools wishing to commit to such a semi-permanent relationship.</p> <p>Forming a hard federation can be a first step to becoming a MAT.</p>
Does it meet minimum criteria?	<p>Values</p> <p>By definition, a federation would be a collaborative enterprise with like-minded schools towards shared objectives.</p>
	<p>Identity</p> <p>Common federation GB and committees would work in the interest of the federation rather than each member school. This would impact identity of each school, and place more emphasis on the new federation entity.</p>
	<p>Local</p> <p>Would need to be local to work. Still a large pool of local primaries to choose from, a much smaller pool of secondaries.</p>
	<p>Net benefit</p> <p>A hard federation might bring a net financial benefit, although with significant upheaval. Hard federation model likely to demand closer integration than some MAT models.</p>

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CONVERT TO STANDALONE ACADEMY	
Local Context	
Impact on Challenges	<p>Financial stability A one off grant of £25,000 is provided for conversion from well performing maintained school to academy. This is to cover legal fees to produce articles of association, transfer of property and legal arrangements etc. An external project co-ordinator may be required. LA may charge a fee. Grant may not cover these costs in full. There will be no economies of scale. The freedom to source services away from LA already exists as maintained school.</p>
	<p>Recruitment & retention No impact. Although new staff may be cautious about joining an “isolated” school.</p>
	<p>Sustainable school model in changing environment The DfE only approves conversion to standalone academy in exceptional circumstances.</p>
Does it meet minimum criteria?	<p>Values No impact. Although standalone doesn't fit well with an outward looking school.</p>
	<p>Identity No impact.</p>
	<p>Local n/a</p>
	<p>Net benefit None.</p>

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LA MAINTAINED SCHOOL (CURRENT MODEL)	
Local Context	<p>In RBG 15 primary schools are academies, 63 are maintained. 9 secondary schools are academies, 6 are maintained.</p> <p>Most primary school academisation has happened in the last few years, and formation and growth of MATs may continue. This together with the loss of the Education Services Grants, risks an erosion of funding for LA education services; and a change in the role of the LA, although the LA retains overarching responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children and young people in their area.</p>
Impact on Challenges	<p>Financial stability</p> <p>Funding decreasing in real terms each year. Budget forecasts a deficit in 2022/23 of ~£120,000 assuming trend continues. This will have a significant impact on the way the school operates and the opportunities the school is able to provide. The school will need to develop revenue generating streams.</p>
	<p>Recruitment & retention</p> <p>The school offers a clear career development pathway, excellent CPD opportunities and good support for teachers at all stages of career. Retention is currently good. Reduction in funding may impact this, however all schools are in the same position.</p>
	<p>Sustainable school model in changing environment</p> <p>An increasing number of schools in Greenwich are moving into structured relationships, with financial/organisational commitments and an increasing emphasis on supporting their members rather than “associates”. Looser working relationships are increasingly likely to become harder to maintain and develop in this environment. It will be a challenge for Sherington to avoid becoming isolated, although there are a large number of maintained primary schools at present which presents opportunities for new relationships.</p>
Does it meet minimum criteria?	<p>N/A - by definition Sherington current model meets criteria.</p>

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JOIN MULTI ACADEMY TRUST: CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING A MAT	
Local Context	<p>15 primary schools in RBG are academies, 63 are maintained. 9 secondary schools in RBG are academies, 6 are maintained. (sponsor versus converter mix not known).</p> <p>Labour party policy is against further academisation and RBG is a Labour-led local authority. The council's view is that if fewer schools remain part of the local authority this weakens the overall local education provision.</p> <p>There have been a growing number of MATs locally in the last couple of years. All are single phase at the moment.</p>
Impact on Challenges	<p>Financial stability</p> <p>MAT would need to be of a suitable size to benefit from economies of scale: at least 6 primaries or >3000 pupils.</p> <p>MAT would ideally need to have positive track record of at least 5 years. We would need confidence in their business plan and growth strategy.</p> <p>Needs to demonstrate strong financial management capability/expertise in staff & trustees.</p> <p>Need to understand top slice, how it's calculated (e.g. including pupil premium?), and what it covers.</p> <p>Need to review remuneration of executive leadership team - level & trends.</p> <p>Need to understand what freedoms/flexibility individual schools have in budget planning and control. How is contingency managed across schools?</p>
	<p>Recruitment & retention</p> <p>Potential to share staff eg pool of specialist teachers.</p> <p>Joint planning for recruitment & retention - shared ongoing recruitment pool. Career progression prospects.</p> <p>CPD.</p> <p>The impact of MATs on staff recruitment & retention is not clear cut, as there is both internal and external movement. Aspects relating to recruitment and retention need to be understood in the context of specific MATs.</p> <p>Most staff employed by MAT should have base school stipulated in contract – the potential requirement for staff to move around all MAT schools is likely to reduce applicants for roles, unless the role is one that cuts across all schools.</p>
	<p>Sustainable school model in changing environment</p> <p>Yes - in comparison to other models reviewed. In comparison to current LA maintained model - unclear.</p>
Does it meet minimum criteria?	<p>Values</p> <p>Any MAT we look at must have aligned values.</p> <p>We need to see these values in action (school visits: eg teaching & learning, environment) and in the empirical data available for the school.</p>

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JOIN MULTI ACADEMY TRUST: CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING A MAT	
	<p>Identity</p> <p>We need to understand the nature of the “delegated independence” that a MAT provides (and any future trajectory for this). Areas to review to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum • Budget • Our “non-negotiables” • Leadership structures • Governance – including staff & parent voice <p>We need to understand what it looks & feels like “on the ground” to be a school in the MAT (eg looking at website, schools visits, letters to parents). Need to understand trustee board and how Sherington can have a voice and influence.</p>
	<p>Local</p> <p>MAT has to have a local presence. We don't want to be on the geographical fringe of MAT.</p>
	<p>Net benefit</p> <p>There is no evidence to suggest that MATs in general bring significant net benefit or detriment, we would need to assess the specific MAT. There is an opportunity to benefit from cross-phase relationship, but at the same time some of our best staff may be called on to work across the MAT. Existing leadership and administration functions in the MAT may impact our own staff. We need to understand the profile of MAT schools (in terms of performance) in order to understand how Sherington would fit and what the impact on Sherington would be. Reputation of individual schools is impacted by that of MAT, and vice versa.</p>

6. Conclusions & Recommendations

Only two of the options considered merit further consideration: the potential to join a MAT, or to remain as a standalone state maintained school. The option to form a new MAT was eliminated by the steering group as it would be a significant drain on the school's resources, would entail significant financial and execution risks, and would be difficult to achieve without building on pre-existing relationships.

The second stage of this decision process will use the criteria identified for assessing MATs to compare potential MATs.

This report was written by the future direction working group and includes the outcomes of the working group meetings on 29th April and 10th May 2018. It has been reviewed and approved by the Governing Body.

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Appendix A: Definitions

Teaching School

Teaching schools give outstanding schools a leading role in the training and professional development of teachers, support staff and headteachers, as well as contributing to the raising of standards through school-to-school support.

Soft federation

Individual governing bodies of two or more schools arrange some of their functions to be discharged jointly through a joint committee (committee acts under delegated power from each collaborating governing body). Committee may address a specific issue, be for a specific duration, or address broader strategic goals. A Memorandum of Understanding may be used to define the terms of the collaboration, particularly where staff or finance is affected. The collaborating governing bodies must determine, and review annually, the constitution, terms of reference and membership of any joint committee they decide to establish. May be dissolved according to rules for disengagement agreed at outset, or GB may leave following decision at full GB meeting. An executive head may be appointed if appropriate. Cannot occur between maintained schools and academies. A “softer” form of federation may be via a joint committee but with no delegated executive powers - decisions are referred back to member GBs to approve.

Hard Federation

An arrangement where two or more maintained schools share a single governing body, under LA control. This is sometimes referred to as a 'hard federation', as opposed to a 'soft federation' where schools establish a joint committee but do not form one governing body. Schools in federations continue to be individual schools, keeping their existing category, character and legal identity, but have their governance provided by the same board. Admission to each school continues to be determined by the appropriate admissions authority. The board of the federation will receive individual budgets for each of the federated schools, and can pool these budgets to use across the schools in the federation as it sees fit. Staff may also be employed at the federation level to enable flexible deployment between schools. All land and property, which immediately before the federation date was held by the governing body of a federating school, is transferred and bestowed to the governing body of the federation. All rights and liabilities that existed immediately before the federation date, which were acquired or incurred by the governing body of a federating school, are transferred to the governing body of the federation. Cannot occur between maintained schools and academies.

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Standalone Academy

Academy schools are state-funded schools in England which are directly funded by the Department for Education and independent of local authority control. Academies are governed by the Academy Agreement it makes with the Department for Education. The terms of the arrangements are set out in individual Academy Funding Agreements. Although academies are required to follow the National Curriculum in the core subjects of maths, English and science, they are otherwise free to innovate, although they still participate in the same Key Stage 3 and GCSE exams as other English schools (which effectively means they teach a curriculum very similar to maintained schools, with only small variations). They are subject to inspection by Ofsted.

Academies are required to adhere to the National Admissions Code.

Academies are self-governing non-profit charitable trusts and may receive additional support from personal or corporate sponsors, either financially or in kind. All academy trusts have at least 2 layers of governance: members of the trust and the trustees/directors. The members of the trust, who are akin to shareholders, are the subscribers to the trust's memorandum of association. Members have a limited financial liability to the trust and can appoint and remove trustees.

The trustees oversee the running of the school and determine its strategic direction. They are also responsible for ensuring compliance with charity and company law and the academy trust's funding agreement. They are accountable to the members of the trust and the secretary of state. The trustees are also the directors of the charitable company and are responsible for ensuring the charitable company achieves its objectives. As such, they can be referred to as either 'trustees' or 'directors'.

Co-operative Academies are based on a variant of the standard Academy Articles, the legal constitution, to embrace key elements of co-operative values and principles: the significance of the international values, the importance of engagement with the constituent members of the learning community and a strong sense of accountability to that community.

In Sponsored Academies, the sponsor is able to influence the process of establishing the school, including its curriculum, ethos, specialism and building (if a new one is built). The sponsor also has the power to appoint governors to the academy's governing body.

Multi-Academy Trusts

A number of private and charitable organisations run groups of academies. A **multi-academy trust** (MAT) is a single entity established to undertake a strategic collaboration to improve and maintain high educational standards across a number of academies. A MAT has overarching responsibility for their governance. In a MAT, the board of trustees may delegate some of its functions to 'local governing bodies' in each or some of the schools.

The MAT is accountable for the performance of each school in the group, although each can still have their own governing body which operates subject to delegation of power from the MAT. Local governors who sit on local governing bodies are not trustees or directors unless they also sit on the trust's board. MATs can adopt various structures. The Board of Directors, or Trustees, will sit at the top with ultimate responsibility for the governance of the trust.

A master funding agreement with the MAT, and supplemental funding agreements with each individual school, is signed by the Secretary of State for Education. All staff will be employed

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by one employer and the trust can share the additional reporting responsibilities required of an academy. A central executive and administration function is usually funded through “top-slicing” each school’s grant.

It may be possible to transfer from one MAT to another, although the trust can prevent this.

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Appendix B: MATS – More Information

Introduction

Academies are accountable to their trust board, which is in turn accountable to the Secretary of State for Education. This oversight is exercised through the National Schools Commissioner and eight Regional Schools Commissioners (RSCs).

The DfE categorises MATs into four different types, based on the number of schools and/or pupils involved:

Starter trusts (1 – 5 schools / up to 1200 pupils)

Established trusts (6 – 15 schools / up to 5000 pupils)

National trusts (16 – 30 schools / up to 12,000 pupils across more than one region)

System leader trusts (30+ schools / 12,000+ pupils)

We may want to prioritise MATs which include schools that are physically close. Smaller MATs achieve this by focusing exclusively on a particular area, larger MATs by building local 'hubs' of geographically close schools.

- Does the geographical placement of the schools within the MAT enable its schools to exploit the benefits of collaboration, including sharing staff, benchmarking, CPD and shared services?
- Does the MAT have geographically isolated schools?
- If a MAT is large and/or geographically dispersed, what central support does it offer, where is it based and how can schools access it that aren't nearby?

Leadership and Governance

Some MATs choose to delegate a significant proportion of their governance functions to school-level academy committees, whilst others retain all governance functions at board level.

MATs can take different approaches to leadership. All MATs are required to have a single senior executive leader (CEO or executive head). It's crucial to understand the approach to leadership and governance taken by any MAT

- Does the MAT have an effective senior executive leader?
- How effective is the MAT's succession planning? What would happen if the current CEO or executive head left?
- Does the MAT have a clear framework for governance (expressed through a scheme of delegation), with responsibilities of the trust board, the senior executive leader and any academy committees made explicit?
- What governance functions, if any, are delegated to school level academy committees?(Our governing body)
- What changes to local governance does the MAT make if schools are underperforming?
- What changes would we need to make to our current governing body and leadership structure to fit the MAT's leadership and governance framework?
- How might the scheme of delegation change in future?

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- Do the trustees appear to have the right knowledge, skills and experience to effectively govern the MAT?
- Have there been recent changes in the executive team or among a significant number of trustees?

Funding Arrangements

MATS receive the **same levels of funding for their students as maintained schools** and there is no additional funding for being in a MAT. However the central team will control the way the budget is disseminated and this may well be completely outside the local SLT team i.e governing body/HT.

New research by the Education Policy Institute (EPI) 2017 suggests that MATs spend less per pupil on running expenses and more on teaching staff than local authority (LA) schools, according to the report: [“The Economic Benefits of Joining, Establishing or Growing a Multi-Academy Trust”](#), prepared for Stone Group, IT solutions provider for the public sector.

In the current economic climate financial planning is crucial. MATs that don't manage their finances effectively are not viable organisations in the long term.

Any central services offered by the MAT are usually funded directly from a 'top slice' taken from the General Annual Grant (GAG) that each school within the trust receives.

MATs take different approaches to how much money they top slice from their schools to fund central services, and to what they offer in return.

Many MATs top slice between three and five per cent of a school's GAG, though some take substantially more or less than this. Note that the level of top slice charged to individuals schools may differ within a trust, depending on the specific needs of the school.

While schools are funded directly from the Education Funding Agency (EFA), the budget is ultimately the responsibility of the MAT board of trustees, through the accounting officer, and there are different levels of financial delegation from trust to trust.

While many MAT boards will delegate a large amount, others will allow very **little local freedom in this area**.

- Is the trust in good financial health?
- Does a review of the last three years' budgets and the next three years' strategic financial plans indicate financial sustainability?
- Are the management accounts regularly reviewed and commented on by the trust board?
- What percentage of its schools' budget does the MAT 'top slice', and what services does it provide in return? Is the same amount top sliced from all schools, or does it vary according to perceived need?
- What level of HR support does the top slice enable the trust to provide?
- Does the trust have people with strong financial and commercial expertise among both its staff and trustees?
- What is the trust's policy on its schools' reserves? *This is important as the healthy surplus we have, may well be utilised for the MAT “family” and it is a significant culture change to start seeing a budget in this way. This can help though on the other hand when finances are required.*

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Recruitment, Retention & Development

Teacher recruitment, retention and development is one of the biggest issues facing the school.

- Bigger pool of staff to choose from
- Larger network of provision of CPD
- Staff can be moved around to suit long term needs and more acute needs
- Specialised Staff can be recruited to work across the MAT
- Some research suggests that in fact, MATs have a slightly higher than average rate of teachers leaving the profession, compared with single-academy trusts and maintained schools, even after accounting for the fact that MATs are disproportionately comprised of sponsored academies.
- NFER research suggests that MATs have internal teacher labour markets that are somewhat distinct from the teacher labour market in the local area outside of the MAT. When classroom teachers and senior leaders move to a different school in the same MAT they are more likely to move to a school with a more disadvantaged intake than a school with a less disadvantaged intake. This is in contrast to teachers more generally, who are more likely to move to a school with a less disadvantaged intake. This suggests that the strategic approach MAT leaders can take towards workforce management might provide an effective mechanism for deploying staff to schools that struggle more with staff recruitment and retention. Staff movement to different schools within the same MAT is highest for senior leaders. <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/teacher-retention-and-turnover-research-research-update-2-teacher-dynamics-in-multi-academy-trusts>
- No clear evidence to suggest that in general MAT recruitment and retention of staff is better, staffing is a key concern in all types of schools.

Sustainable Model in Changing Environment

MATs are one of the main “players” in the current educational landscape. Not many MATS have existed for a decent amount of time to have a credible quantifiable outcome in terms of progress and levels of achievement. MATS are changing in terms of growth and how the Government sees existing MATS. For example a new picture seems to be emerging of MATs collaborating more in partnership with each other.

Values

It is important to recognise that, although a MAT is responsible for more than one school, it is a single organisation. Being part of a MAT therefore brings an intrinsic change to the accountability structure of its individual schools which, despite retaining their own DfE number, no longer exist as an individual legal entity and may give less decision making powers including less guaranteed power to staff and parents.

The hardest to quantify, but probably most important aspect of any organisation is its ethos and culture.

We need to ensure that we get the clearest possible sense of the ethos and culture of any MAT we may consider. The ethos and culture is set by the MATs members and trustees, and so should remain consistent even if the leadership of the MAT changes. The ethos of the trust should be reflected through its stated values, approach to stakeholder engagement and its governance structure, as well as in any trust-wide policies. Questions to explore include:

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- How does the MAT ensure that the focus is on achieving the best possible outcomes for all the children and young people across the whole trust?
- What are its non-negotiables?
- What balance does it seek to achieve between centralised control and delegated decision-making in its schools?
- Is this balance different depending on the different circumstances of the schools involved?
- Which policies are implemented on a trust-wide basis, and which at individual school level?
- How does the MAT listen to its stakeholders?
- What are the governance arrangements below trust board level? For example are the current board of governors to retain a “voice” or will they be more “eyes and ears” only?

MATs usually publish their ethos and vision on their websites, but these statements can be broad, and lacking in detail about what the MAT will look like in the longer term. We need to look at policies for how the MAT manages key areas such performance management, curriculum, teaching and learning, and behaviour to give us a more concrete view of how the MATs ethos is lived.

In terms of vision, a MATs website should also provide insight into its plans for growth and how this will be managed. The most important consideration, however, is the MAT’s capacity to support and challenge its schools. Some MATs have taken on too many schools too quickly – or, more specifically, too many struggling schools too quickly – and have found it difficult to give those schools the support they need without negatively affecting the other schools in the group.

We need to recognise that the landscape in which MATs are operating is still evolving, and that the most effective MATs will be prepared to review and adapt their strategy accordingly.

Any MATs we look at will have to be carefully considered to see if values and ideals match with Sheringtons values and beliefs or at the very least complement them.

There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that MAT values can change and also can be “geared” towards convincing a school to enter into a specific MAT.

Identity

Although there will be a single board to oversee all the MAT, each school still has the opportunity to maintain a local Governing Body. The Scheme of Delegation will have to be carefully looked into to see how much influence the local governors have. A MAT does not have to retain any of the current school governors.

The School’s identity is important. Again this depends on the MAT being considered. Some MATs have a common brand which they “roll out” and these can be very successful. Other MAT’s (which tend to be smaller/medium) allow a school to retain its identity. However by the very nature of joining a MAT, the individual school will no longer be an entity. It will be a part of the MAT and the culture of the school and the way it is considered will have to change. It will no longer be a school of a few hundred children but part of a family of a much larger student body.

The MAT to be considered, will have to be investigated in detail to see how much autonomy the School will retain. One example is that a MAT can have a single literacy coordinator

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over the “group” or for example curriculum based decisions will be taken as part of a much broader decision.

Local

Depends on the MAT - There are a few local MATS and in the main they tend to be single phase MATS (i.e. either secondary or primary). Larger MATs may not be as local but can have regional clusters/hubs.

Net Benefits

There is no overwhelming evidence to suggest that academisation in itself leads to better outcomes for children and young people. There is, however, an increasing body of evidence that formal collaborations between schools, particularly those in federations or MATs where collaboration is consolidated through cross-school governance arrangements and shared accountability, can bring substantial benefits.

Economies of Scale - a MAT can purchase as a whole thereby achieving economies of scale not accessible by the schools as individuals. Note that current thinking is that smaller MATs do not achieve this just by being a MAT and there is a minimum threshold of children within the MAT before this is achieved and this means in terms of more than just breaking even.

Stronger Leadership: School leaders and teachers can combine their knowledge and planning abilities and skills and solve problems together.

Leadership teams can draw on each other’s experience to formulate strategic approaches

Shared Staffing: Human resources within schools can work across multiple sites, particularly in a localised trust. This can help with recruitment challenges and offer more varied opportunities to staff.

Specialist Resources: With combined funding in the trust, specialist knowledge can be bought in in many different areas, both academic, extra-curricular and operational.

Professional Development: This can be organised across multiple schools thus spreading the cost per school and more extensive CPD..

Shared Accountability: As a trust represents multiple schools it’s in its interest to raise the profile of each in line with rising expectations.

BUT

Risks

- As a MAT grows it could become harder to control and be a voice within it.
- Stronger performing schools may spend lot of time and resources helping weaker performing schools to the detriment of their own performance.
- Individual schools may feel their independence is threatened.
- The reputation of one school within the MAT could affect the other schools in a negative (or positive) way.
- One size may not fit all. What is a good solution for a few schools within the MAT may not be the best solution for another school.
- As a MAT can accept new schools at any time, or as the representation on a MAT board changes, it is possible the dynamics that attracted to a specific MAT may shift as time passes.

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- “Joining a multi-academy trust is like marriage without the option of divorce” There is no mechanism for an academy to revert to being a maintained school again, and moving from one MAT to another is currently only possible if the RSC and MATs agree.