

Effective MAT governance

Unit 4: Engagement

A community approach

I have lived most of my life in Airton Bay - the joke is that I escaped to university for a few years and to train as a solicitor but in the end I couldn't stay away. But this is a beautiful part of the world and I wanted my children to be brought up in a close community where they would be surrounded by my extended family and be known by neighbours and friends.

A community MAT

Because this community is also central to our MAT, we looked around for a MAT model that would be suitable for our schools. We wanted to ensure that our MAT is a MAT which gives everyone a clear sense of belonging with the area and this did seem to chime with what others thought. From talking to MATs and doing some research with organisations like NGA we decided that the community MAT model would work for us.

The benefits of a community approach facilitating trust-wide collaboration

Being a small MAT, rooted around this one town not only defined our intention to be a community MAT, it also promoted the school-to-school collaboration that underpins much of our improvement work. Once the 'my school' way of thinking started to break down and we began to develop a real trust-wide culture of collaboration and school improvement, staff became excited at the opportunities offered to work in different schools and to extend their teams.

Opportunities for improving transition to secondary

Our next aim is to get more pupils moving between schools; for example, one school has a very tiny year six next year, and we are planning for them to spend time with another of our larger primary schools so they get used to a bigger environment prior to going to secondary school.

Listening with stakeholders - surveys

Being so clear about the importance of community has meant that we have always placed a lot of importance on listening to our stakeholders. We do this by surveying staff and parents annually. The data we get from these surveys is becoming more valuable year by year as some of the questions stay the same so we are building a longitudinal view. Other questions are more specific to what is happening now. For example, we asked staff for their views on a change to our term time leave policy and we asked parents for their views on the cost of the residential trips.

Reaching more stakeholders - focus groups

We also have used focus groups. This was invaluable when we were looking at our attendance policy. We got together groups of pupils and parents to talk about their

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understanding of the rationale behind the policy and for their views on rewards and sanctions. This gave us the chance to engage with the harder to reach pupils and parents.

Consulting with parents - information and consultation evenings

We also hold information and consultation evenings. When we were considering growing the trust, which meant risking compromising our community ethos, we arranged meetings for our current and prospective parents to explain our thinking and to get their views. One point that was made that took me by surprise is that some parents are concerned that our community is too close, too closed. They want their children to have the confidence to leave the community and to explore the world. In other words, extending the MAT was seen as very much a positive.

Staying in touch - developing an alumni network

Looking forwards, we are exploring setting up alumni with an organisation such as Future First guiding us along the way. One aspect of this will be tracking our pupils' progress beyond our schools so we can see if we really have prepared them for adult life. I've added a link to Future First on the page