

Effective MAT governance

Unit 7: School improvement and performance monitoring

Targeting school improvement

Successful MAT boards make improving school performance, i.e. pupil attainment and progress the core part of the trust's day-to-day activity through:

- Rigorous self-evaluation so that trustees know which schools need improving, why, and how
- Ambitious target setting for improving school performance
- Making sufficient resources available for school improvement support
- A well-structured and systemised approach to school improvement which can flex and adapt as the MAT evolves, commissioning specialist support when necessary
- The creation of a specialist central team which meets the needs of the schools in the MAT, often creating specific posts to deal with specific areas such as director of school improvement or director of primary or secondary

Clear accountability of the CEO role for holding head teachers to account with local governance arrangements that support and inform this process in a defined and meaningful way.

Monitoring performance – understanding the challenges

Some main challenges

1. In all but the smallest MATs trustees will not be able to scrutinise in detail the educational performance of individual schools but remain responsible for pupil outcomes across the trust.
2. Boards need to have confidence in what is reported and so external validation should be sought, especially if there are repeated discrepancies between what is being predicted and final outcomes. Academy committees need to be able to report both to their communities about progress, and to the trust board – especially if progress is not as expected but their role in monitoring and scrutiny needs to be made clear.
3. Changes to curriculum and assessment means that in year assessment of pupil progress may not yet be reliable.
4. Assessment policies and reporting should be standardised across all the schools in the MAT. Bringing new schools into the MAT will mean staff needing to be trained in the trust's assessment and reporting systems.

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School performance data: how do the schools in your trust compare?

If you are a trustee then you should already be receiving benchmarking information comparing the performance of your schools against one another. You may also receive information comparing your schools against other schools locally and nationally.

If you want to see what information is available publicly comparing the schools in your trust against each other try this exercise.

1. Search for 'DfE performance tables' or click on:

<https://www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk/find-a-school-in-england>

2. Click on 'Search for local authority, multi academy trust / sponsor': see screenshot 1
3. Click on 'Multi academy trust or sponsor' and enter the name of the MAT you are interested in: see screenshot 2
4. Click on 'Compare all schools in this trust': see screenshot 3
5. Familiarise yourself with:
 - Primary and / or secondary reporting format and measures
 - How performance aligns - or not - with the school's Ofsted rating
 - Note any areas that you might wish to explore further

Search for schools and colleges to compare

[What information can I find here?](#)

School or college name or reference number (URN)

Location (postcode, town, street)

▶ [Search by local authority, multi-academy trust / sponsor or parliamentary constituency](#)

▼ [Search by local authority, multi-academy trust / sponsor or parliamentary constituency](#)

Multi-academy trust or sponsor

For example, Abbey Academies Trust

▶ [more info](#)

Local authority name or reference number (LA Code)

Parliamentary constituency

Compare all
multi-academy trusts

Compare all schools
in this trust

UID: 2157
Group UID: TR00081
Group type: Multi-academy trust
Region: National Lead 
Further information: [Get information about schools](#)



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A word about Ofsted and MATs

Does Ofsted inspect the trust or each school?

- Ofsted inspects schools, not MATs; however, if Ofsted has concerns about a number of schools in a MAT, it may carry out a focused review of a MAT in which case it will inspect a number of the MAT's schools more or less simultaneously, and will report on its overall findings in a review letter
- If you want to see what a review outcome may look like, Ofsted review letters are published on Ofsted's website:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/outcome-letters-from-ofsted-inspections-of-multi-academy-trusts>
- To see how Ofsted comments on governance in trusts, take a look at the findings of the focused review of the David Ross Education Trust:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/658489/DRET_MAT_review_outcome_letter.pdf
- All Ofsted reports list the school's details, including the appropriate authority which means the accountable body: for schools in MATs this is the Board of Trustees (and not the academy committee even if it is known as a local governing body); it also names the chair, and this is the chair of the trust board and not the academy committee chair (even if it is called a local governing body)

What should a trustee expect on an Ofsted visit

- During an Ofsted inspection, inspectors will want to speak to a trustee about how the trustees carry out their three core functions, most specifically the second core function i.e. holding the executives to account. For practical reasons, this may well be by phone, and trustees should develop a system for making themselves available ensuring that this commitment is shared. In trusts with many schools, this may present problems.
- Trustees should also ensure that their trust's governance arrangements are detailed on all their schools' websites, as well as the trust's website, and that the information is in a format that inspectors can readily assimilate. This will both demonstrate openness and transparency but also recognises that inspections are pressured times for everyone, including the inspectors who have to gather as much knowledge and information as possible to make a measured judgement about the effectiveness of the school. Remember this may be the first thing the inspectors see so you want it to be right to create a strong first impression.
- Inspectors will also spend time speaking to the CEO or her/his representative so that they build an understanding of how the school's head is being held to account and how the school is being supported and improved by the trust.
- Inspectors will also meet with the academy committee to find out if they are clear about their role in the governance structure, if they are carrying out this role well, if

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they are able to raise concerns and with whom, and if the voices of all stakeholders are being considered.

- So as with a single school inspection the trust and its schools need to be well prepared for a visit and can demonstrate with consistent and coherent messages that they know the school and are leading it to improve

School improvement – further resources

- Research What makes an Effective MAT, Ambition School Leadership: research to identify those trusts that had exhibited sustainable growth (maintaining or improving performance whilst increasing in size) and what characteristics are associated with effectiveness

<https://www.ambitionschoolleadership.org.uk/blog/what-makes-effective-mat/>

- House of Commons Education Committee multi academy trusts inquiry report: inquiry into MATs which includes characteristics it believed were essential for a MAT to be successful.

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmeduc/204/204.pdf>

- Case study: the evaluation of a MAT-wide school improvement model through growth by Flying High Trust

<http://www.forumstrategy.org/mat-development-the-evolution-of-a-school-improvement-model/>