

Effective MAT governance

Unit 7 transcript

The positive impact of the external review of governance

You'll remember me telling you about our MAT undertaking an external review of governance. I would very seriously recommend that any MAT considers doing the same, especially if you've been in existence for three or so years, or are looking to grow. It sorted out more than our governance arrangements; it also made us realise that, in order to determine ABCAT's vision and ethos, we needed to be much clearer about our identity and our purpose.

This has led to us thinking strategically, with a realistic plan for growth which does not move us away from our stated aim of being a community MAT, albeit realised in a slightly different way.

Realising the link between vision, strategy and pupil outcomes

In addition to this, we are now much clearer about the nuts and bolts of our roles and responsibilities. We've established the link between our vision and strategy and pupil outcomes. After all 'learning for life' means just that: our schools must not just give our pupils the knowledge they need to pass exams, they also need the skills and behaviours required to be good citizens and responsible members of society. First and foremost this means that they need the basics of reading, writing and maths, but we also want them to have a certain amount of cultural capital.

The trustees' role in relation to curriculum development

Consequently, we are in the process of reviewing our trust's approach to curriculum development, as we are concerned that, at present, it isn't as broad and balanced as it could be. We do know that arts and cultural provision can have a significant positive impact as part of social, moral, spiritual and cultural development as well as improving the learning and outcomes of our disadvantaged pupils. And in some ways creativity is just as important as maths and English in helping our pupils make their way in the world when they leave us. But we need to do this better and we are now considering our schools all seeking Artsmark status.

The trustees' role in relation to progress target setting

We are also questioning if the targets we set our pupils – and schools – are the right ones. We are diligently tracking progress at the end of key stages, and, to date, across the trust we know that our higher and lower achieving pupils make good progress, but our middle achievers can go either way. We need to be better about understanding which schools do better with these pupils and if their practice can be shared.

A strategy to closing the gap for disadvantaged pupils

We also need to look at why the gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged widens rapidly at secondary school and, again, if we have the right strategies in place to address

Effective MAT governance

Unit 7 transcript

this. The real challenge is to extend what we measure to assess how the pupils are developing in more rounded ways, and this is work in progress.

Testing the strategy

Despite these challenges, we now feel that we have thoroughly considered the financial, staffing and other risks associated with our strategy for both improving pupil outcomes and for expanding along the bay. I think it is safe to say that there is cautious optimism about the future of our MAT really achieving its purpose and, therefore, its charitable object without compromising the ideals that energised and motivated us when we set out to form the MAT.

Implementing the strategy - are we making an impact?

We are progressing our strategy and it seems to be working well. Let me just run through where we are with some of the key elements.

Growing the trust

We are carrying out detailed due diligence on the North Bay schools. We have advised them that they should also be carrying out due diligence on us. At the same time, Chris is looking into creating capacity within ABCAT to support more schools, especially as North Bay itself is particularly vulnerable. This may involve some serious decisions about resourcing another member of the executive team.

Improving governance support

We are also looking forward to embedding a proper governance support function in our trust with our lead clerk's role developing. This means that if the North Bay schools join, their transition to trust governance is a smoother experience.

Embedding trust-wide approach to governance

Linked to this is the advent of our first governance conference and Tam has had the brilliant idea that we invite the chair of the MAT that we spoke to when addressing the issue of our mission, vision and values to come and speak about their experience of forming and growing a MAT.

Reviewing the curriculum offer across the trust

We are very much looking forward to finding out more about our schools' curricula and considering if we need a trust-wide approach. This will enable us to refine the measures we are using to see if we are meeting our ambitious aims and, more importantly, if our pupils are well prepared for life beyond ABCAT.

Reporting success to members and our stakeholders

Effective MAT governance

Unit 7 transcript

Finally, we are looking forward to reporting to our members – with confidence. So much so that we have invited parents and carers to the next annual general meeting.

Reporting success to members and our stakeholders

We are keen that they can see the progress that we are making, but we are also keen that they get the opportunity to ask questions of all of us: in other words, making accountability real. We appreciate that this a unique approach but we feel it is important to try new things to improve how we work with our stakeholders. If it works, we would be happy to share it with other MATs – we recognise the support we had from others when we started out and that we all need to learn from one other