

The Spinney Primary School MAT consultation

Advantages and Risk

This list of perceived Pros and Cons to academy conversion has been compiled from a number of sources including the DfE and the National College of Teachers and Leaders as well as the current experience of some MATs. It is clear from research by independent groups that there is great variation between MATs – some are very successful and some have failed:

Potential Advantages:

- Enable governors and leaders to take collective responsibility to provide better education in their community, rather than just in their individual schools.
- Facilitate the sharing of effective practice across a group of schools, so that when a particular approach has been shown to improve teaching and learning, it can be implemented across the MAT.
- Make it easier for teachers to support each other across the group of schools by sharing and learning from good practice, taking on increased responsibility for specialist subjects and acting as a coach and “critical friend”. Ability for NQTs to support each other.
- Ensure the leader or chief executive of the MAT has the levers to secure improved performance of all the schools within the MAT, and are accountable for doing this.
- Potential to move the huge administrative burden on headteachers to the next level of the MAT.
- One of the key benefits of the MAT model is that it leaves headteachers free to focus on teaching and learning. This has led to all teachers now knowing exactly where they are in terms of the quality and impact of the teaching and learning going on in their schools, and the provision of support and monitoring to improve any areas of weakness.
- Formal partnership working between the schools, including subject/area specialisms, staff expertise, shared staff training, shared curriculum development, shared workload.
- Produce a “pipeline of future leaders” by enabling a greater array of middle leadership positions.
- Facilitate the recruitment and retention of staff by giving leaders the ability to point to career development paths and opportunities to specialise within a MAT.
- Generate economies of scale, enabling cost efficient commissioning and purchasing of goods and services, and/or facilitating the development of in-house services for schools across the MAT.

The Spinney Primary School MAT consultation

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- Groups of schools can find it easier to find and fund specialist expertise (both specialist teachers and specialists in areas such as data analysis, finance, health and safety).
- Being able to create new posts across the MAT that would not have been possible in any one individual school, for example, speech therapy.

Potential risks:

- Local governing bodies may feel redundant if their authority to make decisions is taken away and they have no influence over the direction of the MAT as a whole
- Individual schools may be adversely affected by decisions which benefit the MAT as a whole
- MATs can become overly inward looking if individual schools do not maintain connections with, for example, their LAs governor services and other sources of external advice
- There is a danger that as the MAT grows it may become increasingly difficult to ensure consistent systems and procedures are applied across the trust.
- Some loss of autonomy through shared accountabilities
- Short-term increase in costs before longer-term benefits
- Diluting a school's brightest teaching and leadership talent by working with weaker schools
- Insufficient due diligence on joining schools
- Potential building dilapidations, and repair commitments and costs
- Taking on the liabilities of other schools, such as debt and pension costs
- Should one of the academies in the trust fail, this might affect the reputations of all the schools in the trust.

What do we see as the greatest advantages?

- The opportunity for structured shared professional development which will lead to better classroom practice and benefit children.
- The Trust Improvement Group (headteachers of the three schools) will use a planned and detailed approach to analysing and improving performance across the schools.
- The opportunity to reduce the administrative burden on headteachers by moving it to the Trust Board and also 'dividing it by three' ie sharing it

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between the three schools. This will free up time to concentrate in teaching and learning.

- The movement of some governance functions to the Trust Board (which will have relevant expertise) to allow the school governing bodies to concentrate on teaching, learning and the welfare of staff and children.

Can we mitigate the risks?

- By forming our own MAT we can decide how we want to work and define our own vision.
- A driver for all schools is to retain their individuality and the ability to serve their own communities.
- We will be keeping our school governing bodies and believe parent governors play a vital role.
- We have recruited high calibre Members and Directors and have proper separation between the two groups to ensure full compliance with good practice.
- We will take a careful and considered approach to expansion.
- We are performing careful due diligence at this stage and will repeat that as new schools want to join.
- We will not embark on the MAT if the financial due diligence reveals that we will be disadvantaged.
- We are aware of the failings and successes of some other MATs and can learn from them.
- We are all motivated by the same aim – to provide the very best education for the children in our schools and will continuously reflect on that as the MAT goes forward.