

Changing Times

The Future of Education in Birmingham

September 2016



Changing Times: The Future of Education in Birmingham

Written and designed by Clarke Associates

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Contents

- 4 - 5 *Foreword by Colin Diamond, Executive Director for Education, Birmingham City Council, and Tim Boyes, CEO, Birmingham Education Partnership*
- 6 *Creating a City with Opportunity for All... Cllr John Clancy, Leader, Birmingham City Council*
- 6 *Striving for Improvement... Cllr Brigid Jones, Birmingham City Council's Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Schools*
- 7 *Birmingham: Collaboration is Key... Tracy Ruddle, Director of Continuous School Improvement, Birmingham Education Partnership*
- 7 - 8 *Services for Education (S4E) – Charles Elvin, Chief Executive*
- 9 *Christine Quinn, West Midlands Regional Schools Commissioner Designate*
- 9 - 11 *David Griffiths, National Leader of Governance for Hodge Hill District at Birmingham Education Partnership*
- 11 *Birmingham: A Melting Pot...*
- 12 *The Right Model: What's The Best Route to Collaboration?*
- 14 *Talking Heads*
- 15 - 17 *Archdiocese of Birmingham Diocesan Education Service: Adam Hardy, Director of Education*
- 18 - 19 *Ark Kings Academy: Principal Roger Punton*
- 20 - 21 *Arthur Terry Learning Partnership: CEO Richard Gill*
- 22 - 23 *The Birmingham Nursery School Collaboration Trust: CEO Laura Brodie*
- 24 - 25 *Bordesley Green Girls' School & Sixth Form: Head Teacher Judith Woodfield*
- 26 - 27 *The Church of England, Birmingham: Sarah Smith, Diocesan Director of Education*
- 28 - 29 *CORE Education Trust: CEO Adrian Packer*
- 30 - 31 *CREATE Partnership Trust, Executive Head Teacher Pat Smart*
- 32 - 33 *The Federation of Brays School and The Bridge School, Executive Head Teacher Jane Edgerton*
- 34 - 35 *Hamstead Hall Academy Trust: Head of School Jonathan Mortimer*
- 36 - 37 *The Learning Trust for Excellence: Chair Rachel Davis*
- 38 - 39 *Ninestiles Academy Trust: Interim CEO Martyn Collin*
- 40 - 41 *Nishkam School Trust: CEO Brinder Mahon*
- 42 - 43 *Plantsbrook Learning Trust: Executive Head Teacher Tracy Campbell and Town Junior School Head Teacher Adrienne Smith*
- 44 - 45 *Prince Albert Community Trust: Executive Head Teacher and CEO Sajid Gulzar*
- 46 - 47 *Robin Hood Multi Academy Trust: Executive Head Teacher Steve Taylor*

Changing Times: Moving Forward Together...

Colin Diamond,
Executive Director for
Education, Birmingham
City Council



Tim Boyes, CEO,
Birmingham Education
Partnership



In June 2016 we published the first version of *Adapting to Change*, a document aimed at communicating some of the ways Birmingham schools are responding to the education sector's rapidly changing landscape.

We have now produced version two which, as you can see, contains a much greater range of contributions. Thanks to all those education leaders who have been so candid and shared so much information about how they are planning for their future.

This fascinating range of stories tells us about how much good intention, courageous initiative and sheer hard work is taking place in our schools – and all driven by a true sense of moral purpose. Underpinning these stories is a range of voices weaving together to create a colourful fabric of partnerships. We marvel at the complex and varied landscape these partnerships have created and applaud their achievements.

We now need to understand how all schools can benefit in this new landscape. The aim of this document is to guide and inform schools in this city who are in the middle of adapting to change in the new, mixed-economy world. Not much has changed since June. The overall drive towards collaboration remains for the long-term - the era of the stand-alone school is probably over as increasing numbers of MATs and co-operatives emerge.

It leaves schools facing tough questions and equally difficult decisions, particularly when it comes to choosing who to form partnerships with. Whether you are part of an established MAT, on the threshold of joining a MAT, clear that you are comfortable in a co-operative, or just not sure of the best direction of travel, we hope there are stories in this document that will resonate with you and your situation.

The role of Birmingham City Council's Education Services will become clearer as the new school year evolves. BCC is already planning for September 2017, when its duties for school improvement end in line with the White Paper 'Educational Excellence Everywhere'.

BCC remains committed to working in collaboration with a range of organisations in Birmingham to secure the best outcomes for our children and young people. It aims to provide or commission the very best services across its remaining areas of responsibility, which are considerable. The best education systems in England will be built of a mixed economy of partnership – and any notion that Local Authorities will have nothing to do with schools is just plain wrong.

Much work is required to make sure that the new system for school improvement works well from day one. BEP will continue to hold the reins on school improvement, working with the West Midlands' designated Regional Schools

Commissioner Christine Quinn and the rich resource of teaching schools, NLEs, SLEs and LLEs that are on our doorstep.

In line with the current national policy, BCC remains pragmatic about school structures. The challenge for BEP is to unite all schools within a coherent 'whole'.

What is clear from the stories shared in this document is that there are experiences we can all learn from. However, we have to

ensure that, as we move forward, we do not build a city of competing empires working against each other.

These partnerships – whatever their form, be it MATs, federations or co-operatives - must come together, for the good of all schools across the city. One partnership must not be allowed to flourish, to then in turn place another in jeopardy. Indeed, BEP and BCC have a shared vision of schools working within a city-wide partnership which encourages independence as well as interdependence.

“
The most important thing at this point is well-researched and informed planning about the best way forward for your school. Don't rush – there is plenty of time.”

This city-wide partnership, in our minds, will underpin the belief that no school should be isolated and that all schools should accept responsibility for both their own pupils and the education of every child in Birmingham.

However, this vision will not be achieved unless the 'whole' we create is great enough to be able to inspire all schools to want to be part of it. Excellence will create the leverage to draw everyone together. BEP's ambition is to create a new approach to academisation, building on the lessons learned from early adopters, to ensure that no school is languishing behind or left feeling like the poor relation. From here on in, BEP seeks to design a system with the right kind of connections to avoid us ending up with some pupils being losers while others are winners.

As BCC's role changes, we need to establish how to use BEP as a vehicle to create a city which is a unifying force, in which poor practice is challenged and there is a shared sense of responsibility to plan and act together for the good of all our children.

BCC and BEP are united in our concern about the overall well-being of children and young people across our city's nurseries, schools and colleges - we want them to succeed wherever they are. And we think it is so important that the Birmingham family of schools holds together and gets stronger in the years ahead.

So where do we go from here? The most important thing for you to do at this point is well-researched and informed planning about the best way forward for your school. Don't rush – there is plenty of time.

And perhaps there is a new need for humility, to see that we can learn from people who approach schooling very differently to us. In order to really work well together we need honesty, goodwill, trust, grace and patience in understanding others.

We have lots to do and we look forward to working with you to deliver the future.

Sincerest thanks to all those who have contributed to this report - and particular thanks to Emma McKinney, of Clarke Associates, for making it all possible.

Enjoy.

Creating a City with Opportunity for All...

Cllr John Clancy, Leader, Birmingham City Council:



As the most youthful city in Europe, supporting young people to realise their potential is paramount - enabling Birmingham to be a great place for children to grow up and learn in, for adults and families to thrive in and, as we mature, to grow old in. And Birmingham must be a place where future success for the city means opportunity for all.

“*I want to continue building partnerships with all schools in the city. Every head teacher, regardless of the type of school, is a civic leader who makes a big local contribution to Birmingham.*”

The council’s role is to lead with others. Our shared purpose is to improve people’s lives, working with partners from across this great city - pulling together, with leaders across Birmingham and the West Midlands, to ensure citizens have services they deserve.

I want to continue building partnerships with all schools in the city. Every head teacher, regardless of the type of school, is a civic leader who makes a big local contribution to Birmingham.

We need a successful education system in Birmingham - from our outstanding nurseries to our world class universities – to underpin the future economy and glue together community cohesion.

I wish you the very best for the school year ahead.

Striving for Improvement: Working Together to Create High-Achieving Schools...

Cllr Brigid Jones, Birmingham City Council’s Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Schools:



Schools in Birmingham are producing some great exam results, on a par with national achievements and often better than core cities and our statistical neighbours. However, our aim is to make all our schools ‘Good’ or ‘Outstanding’.

Our improvement plan has set out a vision where every child achieves his or her potential. To do this we must continue to collaboratively drive forward innovation and improvement so every child can access the best education and prosper in a safe environment.

We are heading in the right direction, and we are confident that our partnerships with BEP – commissioned by the council to drive school improvement and now in year two of that work – is the right vehicle to achieve our goals.

“*Collaboration is the way forward. No school is truly safe if not formally linked into strong partnership with others in the city.*”

I want to see all schools sign up to the development of a Birmingham Charter. At the heart of the Charter will be a shared goal to work together to exchange information and create a system where knowledge is power and the sum is greater than the parts. Collaboration is the way forward.

No school is truly safe if not formally linked into strong partnership with others in the city. Together we will support each other to ensure standards are at their highest and no establishment is allowed to ever become isolated again. At a time when government policy risks the fragmentation of the education system in the city, it is vital that we stand together as one family of schools.

I want to thank everyone who is working so hard for all our children and young people.

Birmingham: Collaboration is Key...

Tracy Ruddle, Director of Continuous School Improvement at Birmingham Education Partnership:



Birmingham's education make-up is both complex and ever-changing, and we see BEP as the glue that holds it all together. Central to our ethos is ensuring every school is part of a family of schools, and that there is good local and city-wide knowledge.

We recognise the challenge of keeping up with, and staying ahead of, continual changes to education policy nationally and within the city itself. Undoubtedly, Birmingham's education sector has faced its fair share of tough times in recent years.

“*Most schools value their autonomy and independence, but that in itself is not enough to drive school improvement.*”

But the city has a history and a culture of supporting each other to rise above the challenges it has been thrown. BEP is now working to ensure that school improvement is in the hands of school leaders, and that no school, head teacher or governing body feels isolated, unsafe or unsupported. The focus is to drive improvement by engaging with schools, brokering support and encouraging meaningful and useful friendships between schools.

Most schools value their autonomy and independence, but that in itself is not enough to drive school improvement. Working together we can challenge each other in a way that adds value in all schools. Collaboration is key, and is driven by both BEP's regular district strategy group meetings and our district representatives, who represent Birmingham's ten constituency areas.

Head teachers come together in each of their district areas to focus on what is affecting them – the result is the creation of small yet powerful networks with a joined-up approach to tackling issues, resolving problems and sharing best practice.

Our mission is to secure a deeply good academic, social and civic education for every pupil in Birmingham. We

need to ensure every child and every school in this city achieves their full potential. 80% of Birmingham's schools are currently rated by Ofsted as 'good' or 'outstanding' – a fantastic foundation to build upon. We need to remember the power of education to change lives and we see BEP as the place to come together to ensure schools are choosing the right partnerships to deliver school improvement.

Services for Education (S4E) – for education, not for profit...

Services for Education (S4E) is a charity dedicated to providing the highest quality services to schools at the lowest viable prices. It was initially formed out of three component services previously provided by Birmingham City Council, the Music Service, the Health Education Service and the Learning & Assessment Service.

Additionally, it now provides a Learning Technologies Service and is looking to expand over the coming years with additional services schools need and want. The charity commenced trading in September 2012.

Charles Elvin, Chief Executive:



I joined S4E only last month and come from a career which has been dedicated to education and learning. I volunteer as a school governor and I combine a genuine passion for education with a depth of commercial and charity experience across the education sector.

I take over the reins from former Chief Executive David Perkins, a man of tremendous energy, vision and integrity who has been instrumental in leading the transfer of music, health education and learning and assessment services from Birmingham City Council to the newly formed charity, S4E.

David identified that the services S4E provide would be more effective if they were delivered by an independent, not-for-profit organisation. It comes from a belief that services to schools should be the best value and quality possible, and surpluses should be used to enhance and sustain the services rather than be re-directed to shareholders.

His foresight has resulted in the stable and successful organisation that S4E has become. In 2015/16 it helped support over 35,000 children in Birmingham schools and

works with over 80% of the schools and settings within the Local Authority.

Through our school support services we aim to provide a comprehensive menu of professional development to support whole school improvement across six themes: teaching and learning, assessment, safeguarding, emotional health and well-being, EYFS, NQT support and early career development, and leadership and management.

We provide high quality professional development and training for schools and early years settings. Our support can be accessed through in-school and centre-based sessions. We are happy to work with whole staff groups; targeted teaching and support staff; governors and parents; or provide one-to-one consultancy work.

We are proud of our long tradition of supporting schools - raising standards in the largest Local Authority in England. Moving forward, we aim to continue to be responsive to school need in what can only be described as a rapidly evolving and changing landscape.

We work with schools to identify the most effective methods of CPD by providing the highest quality facilitators - thus enabling the service to be up-to-date and aligned to the demands of the national agenda and the local context. The impact on the child is always at the heart of what we do and we have developed a range of programmes and resources to help build on their development, as well as the professional development of school staff.

Among our training programmes are maths intervention schemes such as Every Child Counts, as well as initiatives to develop confidence in music. We also help schools to develop PSHE and Citizenship schemes, including establishing a curriculum to promote safeguarding and British Values.

We have a team of core advisors who deliver our services and we work with a number of lead practitioners from Birmingham schools, many of which are Specialist Leaders of Education. These lead practitioners support the delivery of our course programmes and also function as key members of our moderation teams. They have all demonstrated themselves as being outstanding in their curriculum area or fields of expertise, and enable the School Support Service to offer a broad spectrum of high quality professional development.

We also offer an online portal, called Trace, to support learning, teaching and monitoring pupil progress as teachers assess without levels in the new national curriculum. By introducing Trace, schools can manage and monitor pupil progress and school performance more effectively, capturing attainment against expectations, and identifying next steps for future planning.

The largest service we offer is the Music Service which is the lead organisation in the Birmingham Music Education Partnership. Teachers visit schools on a weekly basis teaching pupils the musical skills identified with playing an instrument or singing. The pupils are taught in whole classes, small groups and individually and benefit from the free loan of a musical instrument whilst being taught by the Music Service.

The comprehensive range of instruments available includes orchestral, brass band, guitar, keyboard, south Asian, jazz, steel band, percussion and voice. Over 35,000 pupils are supported each week in 395 schools and settings. The Music Service also provides over 70 youth orchestras, bands and choirs both on a city-wide and area basis performing at Symphony Hall, Town Hall and other major venues. These ensembles are provided at no cost to parents.

Our newest service is the Learning Technologies Service, providing technology-based solutions to schools, local educational establishments and the wider education market. These services are provided by a team of education technologists who come with a wealth of experience as the acknowledged experts in their sector.

We are developing a partnership approach with Birmingham schools and settings, which seeks to build upon the existing relationship that the company has with its schools. In its broadest sense, we are looking to provide affordable ICT strategic advice, support and development that leverages the charitable ethos of the company thereby enabling schools to continue to benefit from the wider range of services that S4E Ltd provides.

I look forward to helping the charity to continue to provide and develop high quality services to Birmingham schools, as well as broadening our range of services and providing them on a wider basis to educational settings beyond the confines of this city. For further information please see www.servicesforeducation.co.uk and get in touch.

“
We are proud of our long tradition of supporting schools - raising standards in the largest Local Authority in England.”

Christine Quinn, West Midlands Regional Schools Commissioner Designate:



As I take on my new role, I pledge to leave no stone unturned in our joint endeavour to secure a 'Good' school for every child – it's what the young people of the West Midlands justly deserve.

Birmingham is already home to a number of 'Good' and 'Outstanding' schools, we now

need to grow this number to ensure that our children are getting the standard of education that they are entitled to.

“*The belief is that, through collaboration, schools learning from each other, and support and challenge from within the system, significant improvements can be accelerated and upheld.*”

The recent White Paper 'Education Excellence Everywhere' clearly sets out how the Government believes this entitlement can be met and, more importantly, sustained. The belief is that, through collaboration, schools learning from each other, and support and challenge from within the system, significant improvements can be accelerated and upheld.

Clearly the Government believes that MATs are the best vehicle to promote a collaborative approach towards a sustained school improvement system.

Head teachers and governing bodies of successful schools have always ensured that they not only meet the needs and aspirations of their communities, but they challenge and grow them. They look beyond the present to the future and to structures that will enable generations of children attending their school to have at least as good an experience as those current students – if not better.

They also try to implement structures which go beyond their current leadership and governance, and it is this which often proves difficult without a legal framework.

MATs combine the mechanisms and levers for improvement within a legal framework, which as the system matures and the number of MATs increases, the support and challenge become constants in the system. As someone who has spent the last 25 years working in Birmingham I know the

rich history of consortia and networks, particularly through my role as Vice Chair of Birmingham Education Partnership (BEP).

I am also aware of their varying levels of success. Where these consortia and networks have been successful, they have clearly demonstrated the impact of their collaboration on improvements across their group of schools - sometimes over significant periods of time.

More frequently, however, they have either been ineffective or, following a successful start, have faltered. In such areas some schools, their leaders, teachers and governors, can become isolated - and the pupils pay a heavy price.

I have strong relationships with Birmingham City Council and BEP, which will form the foundation of my work moving forward with head teachers, governors, and leaders to achieve success for all children in Birmingham schools.

BCC and BEP are committed to ensuring no Birmingham school is isolated, and it is with that shared goal I embark on my role.

I can also see BEP's potential to be the glue that holds Birmingham schools together as they charter their journey through the education sector's choppy and unpredictable waters.

I look forward to working with all schools in Birmingham, whatever their designation. I am happy to meet with schools and groups of schools as they consider their future. I don't need to tell you my legal remit, you will be well aware of that, but my responsibility is to work with governors, leaders and teachers to the benefit of our children.

David Griffiths, National Leader of Governance for Hodge Hill District at Birmingham Education Partnership:



I first decided to apply to become a governor when my son went to Plantsbrook School in 1994 as I was determined to take an active role in the school responsible for educating my children.

I have a strong belief in the importance of schools providing the best quality of education

for all and the provision of the right opportunities for young children to grow, develop and learn. My passion

for governance and school scrutiny has grown since those early days and, over time, I have become more and more involved in a number of schools.

I have been Chair of the Board of Trustees at Plantsbrook Learning Trust from its inception in November 2014. I am also Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees at Leigh Trust and Chair of Alston Primary School's Local Governing Body, a member school of Leigh Trust. Additionally, I am National Leader of Governance for Hodge Hill District for Birmingham Education Partnership.

I feel privileged to be a part of Plantsbrook's journey, from its conversion to academy status in 2011 and then its subsequent decision to form a MAT in 2014.

At the time the idea was first mooted for Plantsbrook to become an academy I was chairman of the governing body. We felt there were many advantages to being an academy, even if we didn't necessarily choose to exploit them all.

Academy status certainly would afford the school autonomy and certain freedoms, which we felt it could benefit from. There were also financial incentives associated with conversion, so in purely pragmatic terms it made sense.

However, for me, it was also about recognising that it was a necessary direction of travel in an ever-changing educational landscape. Personally, I had no reservations as I was convinced it was the right path to take. Naturally, however, some governors had concerns as academisation is, and has long been, a contentious issue.

However, the vote was in favour and subsequently every governor responded positively to the change, which I think in large part has been due to the way in which the school has subsequently been led and governed.

Our focus has never varied. It has always been and remains about the provision of the best educational experience and opportunities the school can offer its students – a driving factor behind the decision to form a MAT and create Plantsbrook Learning Trust.

As with conversion to single academy status, becoming a MAT was again about recognising the direction of change and trying to stay ahead of the inevitable drivers. However, I did have some reservations, primarily due to my experiences of the primary sector and I was concerned

about our ability to harmonise the very different cultures that exist within secondary and primary sectors. This potential pitfall was avoided, however, perhaps because we were aware of the dangers and we have remained conscious of the need for balance across the sectors.

There is a lot made about financial efficiencies that can be achieved in a MAT and it is true that this is an important element offered by a MAT structure. However, I think the greater benefits come from the synergies that can be created that improve the quality of the education provided. Both schools within Plantsbrook Learning Trust have learnt from each other's different practices, and collaborations

have been promoted and formed leading to enhanced learning opportunities for staff and pupils alike.

Leigh Trust has also provided similar synergies to those at Plantsbrook Learning Trust, but as Leigh Trust only consists of primary schools I have seen how opportunities have arisen for staff to develop and gain

promotion within member schools of the MAT. This has really seen Leigh Trust become a MAT that is growing and developing its own future leaders, while also increasing the pool of teaching and leadership talent available to all schools across the MAT providing, as it does, for the cross fertilisation of ideas and the increased scope to share good practice.

Apart from other primary schools seeing Leigh Trust as a model in their area, a better understanding of the primary phase has helped in recognising potential pitfalls in a cross-phase MAT.

One significant change is around the governance structure of a MAT compared to a single school and, as trustees, I think initially we struggled to define and determine our new role and responsibilities. Eventually we recognised that nothing effectively changes other than the scale of the responsibility. Essentially it is about a shared vision and ethos.

As a governor of a school that may be considering converting to an academy or joining a MAT, I think the most important question should be – how will this move benefit our children?

When choosing a MAT, they should consider whether they have a shared vision and ethos, while thought should also be given to whether the school would be happy to give up

“*Our focus has never varied. It has always been and remains about the provision of the best educational experience and opportunities the school can offer its students – a driving factor behind the decision to form a MAT and create Plantsbrook Learning Trust.*”

its current autonomy to become part of something bigger and hopefully better. I believe MATs formed from a cluster of local schools afford the best opportunity for success, however, that's obviously not the only option.

Governance, arguably now more than ever, is such an integral role to a school's success. I would encourage all schools to deliberate long and hard over those they choose to take on board – the key qualities they need to possess are integrity, interest and commitment.

It is also beneficial if they are self-confident, articulate and numerate and that they are keen to develop, learn and attend necessary training.

Chairs of governing bodies must provide leadership and act as a role model. They need to encourage other governors to take on increasing responsibility. Meanwhile, from my experience, the role of Chair or Vice Chair of Trustees at a MAT is also critical in securing a sustainable and viable organisation.

Their role is crucial in selecting the best quality CEOs, executive head teachers and governors who are driven by a moral imperative which extends beyond their own school gates into the larger educational community of Birmingham.

Doubtless there are many hurdles and pitfalls currently facing schools but I think potentially most damaging of them all would be the failure of SLTs to recognise the significance of the White Paper 'Educational Excellence Everywhere'. While on the surface it appears that there has been a U-turn on forced academisation, it is clear the Government has not particularly altered its intent - it has merely nuanced its approach.

It requires real leadership to recognise the need to sacrifice autonomy for the benefit of being a member of a MAT. This may prove particularly difficult for the heads and governors of a school currently judged 'Good' or 'Outstanding'.

However, I would argue that it is better to form a positive collaboration now while the choice of which MAT to join is still within their control, rather than risk the chance that that choice might be taken away should their Ofsted grading change for the worse. In such circumstances, it may prove to be the case that the decision will be made for them.

I end by quoting National Schools Commissioner Sir David Carter: "Who benefits from the creation of MATs? If the answer is not the pupils then you are seriously missing the point."

Birmingham: A Melting Pot...

Birmingham is home to the full range of schools, including academies, free schools, independents, grammars, special, faith, foundation, Local Authority maintained, community, voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools. The city is home to 447 schools in total, 64% of which are Local Authority maintained and 36% of which are either an academy or a free school. Among the 146 academies in Birmingham, 85 are converters and 61 are sponsor-led.

And Birmingham is also a city of a wide variety of collaborative networks, from multi-academy trusts to co-operatives, federations and teaching schools. This wide mix of schools, coupled with Birmingham's rich and diverse ethnic, religious and cultural make-up, makes it the great city it is today.

Research shows that in 2011, there were 31,737 primary pupils in Birmingham from 87 different ethnic groups. According to a report by Birmingham Community Safety Partnership, the pupils spoke a total of 108 languages between them, from English to Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali and Somali.

Further research shows that in 2013, Birmingham was the Local Authority in England with the highest number of pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL), with 40% of the city's total 63,216 pupils not having English as their Mother Tongue.

Despite this potential language barrier, combined with the city's high pupil mobility rates, Birmingham schools are becoming some of the best in the country – precisely because of its diverse make-up.

“*Birmingham is a city of a wide variety of collaborative networks, from multi-academy trusts to co-operatives, federations and teaching schools. This wide mix of schools, coupled with Birmingham's rich and diverse ethnic, religious and cultural make-up, makes it the great city it is today.*”

In a report published by think tank Civitas, former Chairman of the Equality and Human Rights Commission Trevor Phillips said: "... a critical mass of high achieving minorities lifts the performance of the children from the dominant white minority too."

And Birmingham has long had a reputation for opening its doors to those in most need of refuge. Oasis Academy Foundry in Winson Green is one of a number of the city's schools to have received a Birmingham School of Sanctuary Award.

Last year the school reported how, at the time, its 228 pupils spoke 40 languages between them. Like many other schools in Birmingham, it has opened its doors to welcome children who have been traumatised by life in war zones in Iraq and Syria to name but two. Other children being given new hope and the chance of a brighter future are Roma families from all over Europe who have been persecuted in their own homelands.

The Right Model: What's The Best Route to Collaboration?

For each school, the right model will be the one that best fits circumstances and needs. Each arrangement brings its own potential benefits:

- Co-operative - retain their independence, but gain advantages from working as part of a wider collaboration;
- Federation – the ability to pool budgets, and to share governance, resources and staff more easily;
- Multi-Academy Trust – the benefits that external partners can bring to school improvement.

Entering into a formal collaboration may often be more like a journey than an event. There are many ways of collaborating formally and different types are not mutually exclusive.

The benefits

Research has shown the benefits could be:

- Increased long-term viability of the school;
- Improvements in the quality of leadership and management;
- More chance of recruiting high quality staff, at all levels;
- Enhanced opportunities for leadership development;
- Broader and richer curriculum experiences for pupils.

Making it happen

Weighing up the alternatives:

- Who are our potential partners?
- What models of collaboration would fit our circumstances best?

- What are the potential advantages/disadvantages of each?
- Which are most viable and most sustainable?
- Who can help us in the process?

Identifying the potential obstacles

Being aware of pitfalls:

- Who might think they are losing out?
- Who will be most unsettled by the change?
- What specific issues are there – staffing, accommodation, statutory considerations?
- Is the plan affordable – in the long as well as the short term?

Communicating the vision

Getting the message across:

- What matters most to people?
- How can we generate enthusiasm and commitment for change?
- What will be the real, tangible benefits of our proposals?
- What do we expect the school to look like in the future?
- Who can help us get our message across?
- How can we enter a dialogue with all stakeholders?
- What are likely to be their biggest concerns?
- What form of consultation should we undertake?



Talking Heads

Archdiocese of Birmingham Diocesan Education Service:



There are 238 schools within the Archdiocese, which stretches from as far north as Stoke-on-Trent to as far south as Reading. Currently 93 of its schools are academies and they operate within 17 Multi Academy Companies (MACs). MACs are similar legal entities to MATs and there are two MACs in Birmingham – John Paul II MAC in Sutton Coldfield and Lumen Christi Catholic MAC in South Birmingham.

The Archdiocese also has Bishop Challoner and John Henry Newman operating as academies from pre-MAC model arrangements, while a further seven more schools are currently at some stage of the conversion process.

Adam Hardy, Director of Education:



The Archdiocese of Birmingham has a history of outstanding practice in terms of forming school-to-school partnerships.

There are, for example, 80 schools within Birmingham that have been part of the Catholic Primary Partnership for more than two decades.

Indeed, at the forefront of our minds has always been the necessity to ensure that Catholic education is fit for purpose – which means working and reacting to the challenges of changing times.

When I started my career as a head teacher 13 years ago, the education sector was a very different place. It has evolved monumentally, particularly in the last five years. And we are very conscious that we are living through one of the biggest times of challenge and change that we have witnessed in recent years. This has escalated the need for us to focus on the nature of our school partnerships as we work to keep up with the Government’s high demands in terms of school performance.

While 93 of our diocesan schools have converted to academy status, the Diocesan Education Service (DES) has taken a neutral position to academies and will continue to support all of our schools - whether they become academies or continue as voluntary-aided schools.

However, our strategic position has changed. We will no longer allow any Catholic school in the Diocese to work in isolation. We want each and every single one of our schools to be ‘academy ready’. We are encouraging all governing bodies to make preparations for the real possibility of joining a MAC, or working alongside other local Catholic schools, to form a new MAC.

We are suggesting governing bodies set up working parties to begin the journey of becoming academy ready. They need to think long and hard about the right schools to work with, not necessarily just those that are their feeder schools or geographically well located, but those that they can gain from and also those they can offer support to.

We do not want to see undone great links that have been established with other community schools. These should



flourish and grow, but there is a need to ensure that no culture of isolation exists with the Catholic schools of the Diocese.

We believe MACs hold many benefits, with local Catholic schools working formally together for the common good and Boards of Directors forming a strategic vision for the future development of Catholic education locally.

Under-performing schools can be supported within a MAC which is strengthened by 'Good' and 'Outstanding' schools and there are real opportunities for primary and secondary staff to work better together, creating 'Outstanding' Catholic education across the 4-19 age range.

There are still some head teachers who may doubt the philosophy behind academisation. For some school leaders it might be a difficult step to take, especially if they are unaccustomed to working within an open and transparent partnership with other schools which may influence the school they work in. This is understandable and we know we are asking for open minds and open hearts.

However, the agenda of the government is clear: the majority of schools in this country will become academies over the forthcoming years. Whilst the political wrangling of past months has reached a level of compromise for some, the academy solution for most schools is unlikely to disappear.

We know that in the area that our Diocese serves, we have a number of vulnerable Local Authorities. And the powers of the Secretary of State to issue an academy order on any

school have been strengthened by the new Education and Adoption Bill. We know already from our experience in the Diocese of two such orders being issued.

Whilst we have tremendous school improvement tools to hand, the RSC and the Diocese will want to see that our improving schools have secure structures around them enabling this work to flourish.

There is also no doubt that current budgetary issues and changes to the national funding formulae are causing grave challenges for many schools. Schools in financial decline will need to be able to operate with slimmer services as well as working with other schools to improve their economies of scale. Less money also means the need to share more effectively resources in terms of time and personnel, which is another reason why our schools need to be academy ready.

Schools need to ensure they are forming the right partnerships and we need to grow our MACs in order for them to become sustainable.

This isn't just about the here and now, or even the next five to ten years – this is about protecting Catholic education for generations to come.

The spirit of collaboration, if done properly, is very powerful and effective. We have seen many positive outcomes from historical critical moments, such as schools working together to find appropriate leadership succession

where schools have been isolated. Evidence suggests that school-to-school support helps issues to become more manageable, providing easier ways to find solutions that help schools improve.

Our strategic position has changed. We will no longer allow any Catholic school in the Diocese to work in isolation. We want each and every single one of our schools to be 'academy ready'.



All schools have the potential to become vulnerable, which could see them being placed into an Ofsted category. If they operate within a MAC and surround themselves with other schools able to offer support, they then have the knowledge and resources at their fingertips to improve.

The Diocese would envisage in the future, the possibility of MACs being formed to include more than one secondary school and their feeder primary schools. Our reasoning for this change is to enable greater school improvement work for secondary schools and also strengthen the financial resource of the MAC with a greater numbers of students.

However, we accept there are a number of challenges ahead, from growing our infrastructure in order to be able to properly support and mentor our MACs as they grow, while also maintaining standards and accountability.



The role of the DES is to secure, protect and improve Catholic education in all of our diocesan schools – whether VA schools or academies. In this context we see the DES as offering the support to ensure Catholic MACs are a success – brokering services, providing expertise and supporting throughout transition.

We are looking to develop the services we currently provide and to explore providing more centralised services involving key areas such as HR, legal and financial advice.

We also need to ensure we continue to proactively manage our relationship with the DfE and our RSC, within the context of the new Memorandum of Understanding for Catholic schools, while continually adapting to the changing educational landscape.

I know that there is a massive amount of work being undertaken across Diocesan schools to make this a reality, and as the future unfolds we look forward to more opportunities arising.

Ark Kings Academy, Kings Norton:



Principal Roger Punton:



Previously Kings Norton High School, we became Ark Kings Academy when we joined the Ark multi-academy trust back in September 2012.

Prior to transition, we were in a desperate situation as the falling student roll and poor results meant that without a sponsor the school was at risk of closure.

When it came to finding a sponsor, we knew that we needed a MAT which could provide both strong school improvement support and back office infrastructure – two areas we felt had particular weakness.

The area the school serves has significant challenges and the proportion of our students who are eligible for the pupil premium is much higher than average. Student mobility is also above average, as is the number of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities and those who speak English as an additional language.

But we felt strongly that with Ark's expertise and support the school not only had a future, but the future could be bright.

I think it's fair to say that many of us were highly sceptical that we would ever achieve the levels of improvement that Ark believed we would - but four years later we're reaping the rewards.

The culture of high expectations is a fundamental part of the Ark network and is just what our school needed. Students at Ark schools are 40% more likely to have entered secondary school at least one level behind their peers so high expectations and systems that ensure that students make more progress and more quickly than students in other schools is a constant across the network.

In 2015 student progress at Ark Kings was significantly above the national average with 87% of students making expected or better than expected progress in English, and 74% in maths - with 52% of students achieving five A*-C grades including English and maths. Although results dipped slightly in 2016, as they did nationally, the new Progress 8 measure is likely to see Ark Kings in the top 5% in the country with a figure of +0.5 (estimated at the time of going to print).

“*We felt strongly that with Ark's expertise and support the school not only had a future, but the future could be bright.*”

Naturally, ahead of joining Ark, staff were apprehensive and concerned for their job security and feared changes to their contract.

However, it quickly became clear that these fears were unfounded; the training and CPD my staff receive is, in my opinion, the highest quality available – and



with a minimum of ten training days a year far outweighs anything we experienced previously.

There was also no change to contracts; staff had the option to transfer onto an Ark contract if they wished, or remain on an existing Local Authority contract. Collectively my staff have given hundreds of years of service to the children of Birmingham, and Kings Norton specifically; retaining and developing that local knowledge is a central part of our school improvement journey.

As Principal I have autonomy over the running of my school – and like any other Principal I make decisions based on what is right for our students, staff and the local community. I describe Ark Kings as a small school but a big family; we get to know our children well and we know what they need.

Sometimes there is a perception that being part of a MAT means that you lose autonomy – and for some this may be true. But my experience is that the level of support on offer gives me more autonomy; more time to be in the classroom, with the students and with my staff – leading the school in the direction I know it needs to go in.

My advice to anybody thinking of joining a MAT, particularly those in challenging or vulnerable circumstances, would be to look for a trust which has a clear education vision, strong values and ethos, realistic and sustainable growth plans, robust school improvement strategy, and strong back office support.



School improvement doesn't happen overnight – there isn't a magic wand that you can wave or a structure that you can impose which results in instant success. And it hasn't been an easy journey - there have been many

significant challenges along the way but the benefit of being part of a network is that you never face the challenges alone.



Ark's mission is simple – to close the attainment gap. The MAT takes on some of the most challenging schools – like ours - and therefore improvement can sometimes take longer than we would like. But Ark has a proven track record for showing there is always improvement.



My experience is that Ark is never afraid to take on a challenge, and I am proud to be part of the journey which has seen our pupil attainment grow – in turn changing the life course of the young people in our school, as well as impacting the future of their families and their communities.

With student progress among the best in the country, and our new school building opening in January 2017, I know that our bright future will get brighter still.

Arthur Terry Learning Partnership:



The Arthur Terry Learning Partnership (ATLP) is a multi-academy trust of five children’s centres, four primary schools, three secondary schools and one teaching school, based in Four Oaks, Erdington and Coleshill. The partnership includes 4,500 children, more than 700 members of staff, and 70 governors across seven local governing bodies.

National Leader of Education, Richard Gill, CEO of the Arthur Terry Learning Partnership and Regional Member of the Teaching Schools Council:



The ATLP’s seven academies and partners are quite distinctive and separate, serving different communities and phases: but all either are, or have the capacity to become, ‘Good’ or ‘Outstanding’.

Each partner is committed to being a centre of excellence, where every head teacher,

leadership team and local governing body has something unique to share with each other.

We look after children from birth to 18 and all of our partners share the same moral purpose – to improve the life chances of our learning communities. We know that the best way to achieve this is through collaboration, as schools are stronger when they work together.

Our journey began in 2009 with two secondary schools and the ATLP was officially formed in 2012.

Our MAT was built on an idea of working with other schools in order to improve the local education offer for all children, regardless of which school they attend. Our aim has always been to look beyond our own doorstep and to share best practice and resources in order to give every child a quality education.

The opportunity to work together and in partnership with other schools impacts on best practice. That learning impacts on the staff and, in turn, impacts on our students.

“*School improvement is a fundamental part of our work. Our growing capacity and reputation for excellence means that we are often approached to work with others.*”

The Arthur Terry School was chosen by the National College for School Leadership (NCTL) as one of the first 100 teaching schools to lead the training and professional development of teachers, support staff and head teachers, as well as contributing to the raising of standards through school-to-school support.

The Arthur Terry National Teaching School (ATNTS) is leading on a number of key areas which will help a school-led system.

The work of the ATLP is underpinned by the ATNTS. We're building capacity within our own academies and, at the same time, supporting other schools in the area to bring about improvement. We believe in spreading our excellence further and being a National Support School means that we have a vast deal of experience of working with others to raise standards.

As established system leaders, the ATLP boasts a growing number of specialist leaders who work with the teaching school to distribute their expertise across a number of schools in the region to improve performance.



School improvement is a fundamental part of our work. Our growing capacity and reputation for excellence means that we are often approached to work with others. The results of this type of collaboration can be incredibly rewarding – not just for the schools we work with and the improvements they make, but for our own schools too.

Quite simply, through reciprocity you improve and, with the rapidly changing educational climate, the benefits of working together have never been greater. Schools need to support other schools if we are to achieve the highest standards across the teaching profession and for the greater good of all students.

Collaboration is the cornerstone of creating a self-improving and sustainable led system which gives schools the freedom to drive their own destinies and shape a world-class education system.

The Birmingham Nursery School Collaboration Trust:



The Trust was formed in September 2015 and is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. It is made up of 27 Local Authority maintained nursery schools across Birmingham, 11 of which are fully integrated with a Children’s Centre.

CEO Laura Brodie:



Nurseries in Birmingham have a rich history of collaborative working, dating back more than 100 years since they first began opening in the city.

Up until recently, the city’s 27 stand-alone Local Authority maintained nursery schools worked together under the umbrella of a soft federation for seven years from 2008.

Maintained nursery schools in England have developed a reputation as being world leaders in developing and delivering high quality early years education and care.

In fact, all 27 of the nursery schools within our Trust are rated by Ofsted as either ‘Good’ or ‘Outstanding’ and we often share our expertise with other maintained nurseries across the UK, as well as Private, Voluntary and Independent

“*We know we cannot stand still and do nothing – we are determined to fight for our future.*”

nurseries. But we don’t stop there. We have worked all over the world spreading our knowledge and skills.

Over half of our nurseries operate in Birmingham’s most deprived areas, while a significant number of our children are looked after; under a child protection order or have high complex special educational needs or disabilities.

However, maintained nursery schools across the country are very much under threat. We are increasingly struggling to survive. A third of maintained nursery schools in England have closed since 1980 and those that survive face an uncertain future. In Birmingham, our basic budget is being cut by 10 per cent, while funding per child per hour is being slashed by 1.5 per cent.

We know we cannot stand still and do nothing – we are determined to fight for our future.

We realised we had to do something that meant we could take advantage of our wealth of expertise and begin generating our own income stream.

By law, maintained nursery schools are not allowed to convert to academy status, so for us the option of becoming a MAT was off the agenda.

Instead, we looked at the options and decided to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) in September last year. It’s a relatively new legal

entity for non-profit organisations and its benefits are significant for our nursery schools, not least in that it allows us to work like a business, tendering for contracts.

The collaboration means we can broker better value deals when we buy in our services – from school meals to training, which in turn also leads to quality assurance across the board.

There is also flexibility within the CIO, which has allowed two of our nursery schools to federate to protect them from financial threat.

We also operate under a new model, overseen by a Board of Trustees while each nursery school has its own governing body.

The nursery schools are each a member, paying membership fees – a structure which has encouraged a democratic approach to decision-making. Any financial decision we make has to win 75 per cent or more of members’ votes. This means we are working on a united front, preventing our nurseries from becoming isolated mavericks.

At the same time, as each nursery has its own governing body they are able to retain their sense of individuality, reflecting the needs of their own communities.

Meanwhile, the charitable values of the Trust remain at the heart of all we do - ultimately our goal is to support the city’s most vulnerable children.

We have also become a Teaching School Alliance and five per cent of the money the Trust earns is ploughed into the Alliance.

Initially I was sceptical as to whether we would secure any work through the Alliance, but we have organisations snapping our hand off for our expertise which consists of

27 head teachers and 21 deputy heads – a number of which are either local or national leaders of education.

The Alliance is also allowing us to grow our own staff, while also raising our reputation and our profile.

Benefits aside, the transition has been a huge learning curve. I have had to grow into the role of CEO and become quite strict about what it actually entails. At first I was viewed as the nursery schools’ advisor, but the role is much broader. Essentially, I am their ambassador, canvassing opinion and championing our cause locally, nationally and internationally.



The decision to become a CIO has been an overwhelmingly positive one and I think it’s a model that would appeal to many schools that may feel uncomfortable with the idea of academisation.

The model has already proven such a success that we have maintained nursery schools across the country asking to become associate members of our Trust.

We don’t know what the future holds for our nursery schools, but we are confident in the knowledge we are doing all we can to protect them and the education of Birmingham’s most vulnerable children aged from nought to five.

Bordesley Green Girls' School & Sixth Form:



Judith Woodfield, Head Teacher:



Bordesley Green Girls' School & Sixth form (BGGs) has a long history of collaborative working with a number of schools and we have been a member of Cole Heath Consortium for several years.

We have a strong relationship with Marlborough Junior School, also a member of the

Consortium, and it is one of our main feeder schools as we are geographically located close to one another.

Students from BGGs are involved in sports leadership projects at Marlborough and older BGGs students have spent their work experience at the junior school. Meanwhile, modern Languages staff from BGGs have worked at Marlborough, sharing their expertise and helping to boost the learning opportunities available at the junior school.

With only 16 per cent of the pupils in our local catchment area falling into the higher ability category, we know that in order to achieve educational success for all of our

pupils it is imperative that we focus our attention on the quality of teaching – particularly in a climate in which the curriculum is getting tougher and expectations of learning outcomes are rising.

We believe, therefore, that we need to be challenging pupils both at Key Stages 2 and 3, and in order to do that we need to be working closely with junior schools which feed into BGGs.

Some months ago, the head teachers of Marlborough Junior School and BGGs met to consider how we could work together to improve teaching and learning across the transition between Key Stages 2 and 3.

“*We decided that forming a loose federation between the two schools would be a natural first step as it offered all of the advantages of a formal collaboration without the necessity to divert resources into changing the structures of the schools.*”

We identified that we already had a number of similarities which would mean a more formal way of working together would be mutually beneficial.

We decided that forming a loose federation between the two schools would be a natural first step as it offered all of the advantages of a formal collaboration without the necessity to divert resources into changing the structures of the schools.

We believe that this partnership would help us in our shared common goal to improve the



financial efficiency of both of our schools, which is essential at a time in which our funding is being reduced.

A loose federation could also assist in our shared ambition to drive up standards and will help both schools to become part of a sustainable, high performing local education system.

We particularly want to support the driving up of standards in languages, STEM subjects and skills and qualifications needed in the health sector.

These are all key areas that are needed to support the local economy and we have a vision that, by working together, we can position this area of the city as being at the cutting edge of skills development – overcoming the economic and social disadvantages that our communities face.

Our two schools share a belief in the importance of continually developing and retaining high quality staff and we believe this loose federation will mean that we will be better placed to be able to invest in high quality professional development and staff training as costs can be shared and procured together.

Improved efficiencies and reductions in costs across the schools will enable more of the ever-decreasing budgets to



be used for the core purpose of teaching and learning. Ultimately we believe that by working together we can contribute to each other's school improvement agenda, helping each other to be the best schools while also driving up academic standards.

We also felt strongly that this model would also enable both schools to continue to benefit from the support of the Local Authority.

Starting with a loose federation has enabled us to undertake due diligence. The Chair of Governors at BGGs is now also the Chair at Marlborough. Looking to the future, this overview of governance will be crucial when, if consultation supports such a move, we merge governing bodies and create a hard federation.

There would be numerous benefits to a hard federation. A relentless focus by one governing body to raise standards from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 5 will ensure that our children have the best possible start in life and improved life chances.



The proposal to form a hard federation will add significant benefits to the education of all pupils within the two schools. The sharing of expertise in teaching and learning, assessment, safeguarding and pastoral care, SEND behaviour and attendance will benefit both schools.

Meanwhile, BGGs will continue working in partnership with other schools, colleges and universities so that we also have loose federations connecting to our proposed hard federation. By strengthening these partnerships we will have seamless progression all the way through a young person's education.

The Church of England, Birmingham:



Currently, within Church of England, Birmingham, there are 51 schools, of which 21 are academies. The Diocese sponsors six of these academies, three are sponsored by other Trusts and the remaining ten are converter academies. The Church of England is in the process of applying to set up a Diocesan Multi Academy Trust in Birmingham.

Sarah Smith, Diocesan Director of Education:



Part of my job is to support leadership in schools within the diocese, which includes raising standards and outcomes for young people as well as maintaining the Christian character of the school and ensuring quality governance.

Currently a large part of my role relates to helping school

leaders plan for the future, particularly at a time in which there is an emerging drive towards schools working collaboratively in a variety of models including MATs.

We want to help our schools make good choices for the future to ensure that, despite diminishing resources, they can deliver a 'Good' or improved education for their pupils - while at the same time they maintain their Christian character.

We believe that formal collaborations are the best way to achieve school improvement. We also acknowledge that Church schools are able to retain their Christian character

if they choose to join a MAT outside of the Diocese which provides support and a commitment to the school's ethos.

With diminishing budgets and rising costs, it is clear that to sustain a level of educational success there needs to be a sharing of resources - both in terms of the business aspect of a school, and also in terms of school improvement support.

We are therefore looking at two main options for our Church schools, which will see more of our schools either becoming part of existing MATs or will see us creating our own Diocesan-led MAT.

One of the biggest benefits we envisage in creating this central organization would be that it would be able to concentrate on providing or brokering business services, which in turn would free-up the schools to focus on their core function - developing young people in the widest possible sense.

The Church of England celebrates an approach to developing life 'in all its fullness' – developing wisdom (knowledge and skills), community and well-being, hope and aspiration, dignity and respect.

We want to offer these qualities to children and young people in our schools – and also for the adults who we employ and the stakeholders we work with. Once we have been granted approval for our MAT, we will be looking to run a series of events that head teachers and chairs of governors can attend to find out more about how they can become involved, should they wish to.

I would envisage the first schools to come into the Diocesan MAT to be Church of England schools, but in the long-term I could see a place for community schools. It would be fundamental, however, that schools that join our Diocesan MAT share our same vision and values.

Due diligence will be essential; we want to support the most vulnerable, however it will be imperative to know the strengths and weaknesses of the schools who want to join our MAT to ensure we have the right skills and capacity to help them.

Realistically, our biggest challenge is affordability, and to be cost effective, viable and sustainable we need to create a MAT which will cater for at least 2,500 pupils.

Some have concerns that joining a MAT means a loss of autonomy. But I think we are custodians of public funding, whichever 'type' of school we are and schools should be accountable for those resources. Alongside the accountability sits the chance to be part of a strong collaboration, providing support and challenge working towards school improvement.

“*With diminishing budgets and rising costs, it is clear that to sustain a level of educational success there needs to be a sharing of resources - both in terms of the business aspect of a school, and also in terms of school improvement support.*”

We already have good relationships with all our schools, and would strongly encourage heads and chairs of governors to get in touch with us to talk through the best options for their particular school. Church Schools need consent from the Diocesan Board of Education before becoming an academy or joining a MAT.

I think common vision and values are key to the success of any MAT. For some of our schools they are already in strong informal collaborations and would form a natural MAT. We would want to encourage those relationships and help schools to explore exactly what being part of a MAT means - there is a big difference between a strong collaborative relationship between individual schools and the formal accountability that lies in a MAT.

When choosing a MAT, a school needs to be clear about what value it is getting both financially and in terms of the unique offer from a particular Trust.

CORE Education Trust:



The Trust was founded in March 2015 and its inception was inspired by the vision of a small group of people who took charge of the former sponsor Park View Educational Trust in July 2014.

Currently the Trust runs Rockwood Academy and Nansen Primary School, both in Alum Rock, and has an expansion and development plan in place to grow to no more than 20 schools by 2022.

Adrian Packer, Founder and CEO:



CORE Education Trust, in my view, is a beacon of light that has shone from an incredibly dark period in which the actions of our predecessors failed hundreds of children. United by an overwhelming sense of moral obligation to rectify the mistakes of others, the Trust's mission is to provide children with a high quality

educational experience realised through our commitment to four CORE values - Collaboration, Opportunity, Respect and Excellence.

These values place an emphasis on fostering positive relationships and creating a culture of aspiration, purpose and belonging.

We are a relatively new Trust, but already we have achieved national praise. In a short period of time – despite

unprecedented levels of disruption and distraction – the Trust has surpassed the goals it first set out to achieve 18 months ago. Both Rockwood and Nansen have been removed from special measures and each were rated by Ofsted as 'Good' in April – a remarkable achievement which is testament to the efforts and resilience of our school and Trust staff, as well as our unapologetic hands-on, solution-focused approach.

However, the Trust is not complacent. It will continue to support and challenge the schools to progress and develop and will be uncompromising in its pursuit to make rapid and sustained improvements. Our focus is on building our schools' capacity so that they are self-reliant and efficient in their own right.

We have bold plans and a defined strategy to grow our MAT to a maximum of 20 schools by 2022, which will include up to six new free schools.

We will expand the Trust by developing clusters and then networks of free schools and academies concentrated in two UK regions.

“*We are not intent on creating a 'one size fits all' model. We are committed to finding the right solutions for each school we sponsor on a bespoke basis.*”

But we are not intent on creating a 'one size fits all' model. We are committed to finding the right solutions for each school we sponsor on a bespoke basis.

We realise that in order to find the right solutions we need to look at each school in its own local context. Inspired by that context, through careful dialogue, consultation and collaboration, we will then construct and provide innovative solutions and resources.

Each of our schools sets out its own bespoke 'Charter' or 'Standard', which brings the CORE values to life in the specific local context of the school and ensures that expectations are clearly defined, shared and celebrated by everyone.



The Trust has a very experienced and well-connected Board, which has helped us to secure some exceptional partnerships with arts and sports organisations which are committed to helping us to provide the best possible opportunities and experiences to the staff and children in our schools.

The partnerships, with organisations including Birmingham Repertory Theatre; Maverick TV; The Albion Foundation; Lawn Tennis Association; Combined Cadet Force; CREME;



and ukactive, means we can create school environments which are open, outward facing, creative and dynamic.



Importantly, we have learned from the mistakes of the past. At every point in our journey so far, leadership and governance have been the Trust's main focal point. We went from having no proper governance to, I think, a very well defined, sustainable and transparent MAT structure.

The strategy throughout the whole process has been to get the right people - so we got the right governors, the right members, and the right directors. Being a MAT is not just about getting lots of people – more doesn't necessarily mean better.

Most importantly, whether you are creating a MAT or choosing the right MAT as a sponsor, we shouldn't forget we are looking after children.

They should be at the heart of every decision we make. They only get one chance at education, it's our responsibility to ensure that we provide them with nothing but the best shot in life.

CREATE Partnership Trust:



CREATE Partnership Trust is a new multi-academy trust established in September 2016. It currently exists of two schools, Greet and Conway primary schools based in Sparkhill and Sparkbrook. The two schools are also part of Greet Teaching School Alliance, Birmingham's first primary teaching school. CREATE Partnership plans to sponsor a further school in the imminent future.

Pat Smart, Executive Head Teacher of CREATE Partnership Trust and Greet Teaching School Alliance:



It's an exciting time for our schools at the moment as we begin a very new chapter in our journey.

And what a journey it has been. It all began back in 2009 when we first formed The Federation of Greet and Conway Primary Schools. This month we enjoyed another

historic moment when we converted to a MAT - and we have colossal plans for the future.

But I have been regularly asked, why create a MAT? If I'm being deeply honest, it's not about political or philosophical motivation, it is very much for the same reasons we created a Federation. I genuinely believe that being a MAT is the best model for our schools. Our strapline is 'creating futures' and that's precisely our mission – not just for our

pupils but also for our stakeholders and staff.

In my mind there is no question that working in collaboration is significantly more effective than working in isolation. We can share our expertise and widen our skillset across all our schools. We will also be freed from the chains of Local Authority control, which have occasionally shackled us in areas such as staff recruitment. Greater autonomy will bring new and bigger opportunities to our schools.

Having said that, we are not only driven by common sense, we are also motivated by necessity. Our eyes are wide open to Government funding cuts, which mean Local Authorities will soon simply no longer be able to provide





the services we need. Being a MAT means we will be able to procure services ourselves, while making our systems much more streamlined and ultimately delivering better value for money.

And we haven't taken our eye off the ball when it comes to one of the biggest key ingredients in making our vision a recipe for success – our staff.

The reaction to becoming a MAT, in all honesty, has been mixed. Some have wholeheartedly embraced it and recognised it will create opportunities for professional development.

Others have been understandably anxious about the impact on salary and working conditions. However, in terms of day-to-day procedures, there will be no changes – while pay and conditions will actually be protected rather than threatened.

We will follow all national and local guidance for school holidays and hours; we will still teach the National Curriculum; we will maintain our high standard of school meals; our admissions policy will continue to follow Birmingham's guidance and we will continue to serve our local communities.



One change we will see, however, is that the MAT will be governed by a Board of Trustees which will establish a Local Governing Body for each of our schools. We feel this is a significant change which will lead to greater

governance and transparent decision making. We also have a clear plan in place, which undoubtedly is vital for any schools thinking of creating a MAT. We know what we want and, perhaps more importantly, we know what we don't want.

We do not want to become an isolated MAT - we do not want to work in silos, quite the contrary. We are fortunate, particularly due to our connection with Greet Teaching School Alliance, that we have built up strong networks and we plan to continue to develop those.

The first school we will sponsor will be the right one – not one plucked out of the air but, instead, the perfect fit for us. These are our children, they are our future and we have a moral purpose to get it right.

This is not about building an empire, it is about slowly growing a sustainable MAT and developing a school improvement strategy which will focus on driving early intervention and transition for our most vulnerable children.

Ultimately, we want what is best for all of our children, and we have high expectations and high aspirations for every single one of them no matter their background or ability.

This is not about building an empire; it is about slowly growing a sustainable MAT and developing a school improvement strategy which will focus on driving early intervention and transition for our most vulnerable children.

The Federation of Brays School and The Bridge School:



Brays School and The Bridge School are set to convert to academy status in January 2017, when they will become a newly formed MAT called Forward Education Trust. In January 2017 they will also begin sponsoring a third special school, with other schools likely to join the MAT in due course.

The schools educate children with complex and multiple needs and all of their pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an Education Health and Care Plan. They draw pupils from across Birmingham and beyond.

Jane Edgerton, Executive Head Teacher, The Federation of Brays School and The Bridge Schools:



Already Head Teacher at the 'Outstanding' Brays School, I was parachuted into The Bridge School in September 2013 when it faced a whole host of problems, from a lack of leadership to a governing body that was barely operational. We knew at that stage that Ofsted were going to undertake an early inspection.

I brought a seconded deputy head with me and we began the laborious task of wading through the issues across all areas of finance, school improvement and compliance and this included my first big task of reconstituting the

governing body, something I had to do a number of times in that first year.

By November 2013, after some rapid major system changes, The Bridge School was rated 'Good' by Ofsted. It was doubtless a challenging time for everyone in the school. In the first 15 months at the school, we closed a residential unit, closed one site and amalgamated the school onto one combined site, doubled the number of pupils and oversaw the creation of a £1.2 million new building.

Finding good governors was nigh on impossible, and I needed many. I found I was managing two schools independently of each other when they clearly should be collaborating together.

In November 2014 governors at both schools made the decision to create a hard federation, meaning we had one governing body across the two schools. Meanwhile, each school has its own Senior Leadership Team (SLT) which both report to one overarching governing body.

The advantage was that I could work on the ground to foster a collaborative and sustainable practice, whilst at the same overseeing the work of schools across their three sites. I would describe myself as the glue that holds the governance, 350 pupils and an equal number of staff together.

The beauty of the hard federation model is that, while the SLTs can retain their schools' sense of individual identity, they also don't feel isolated. We meet regularly

to discuss issues and we tackle them together. We make sure we have accountable, transparent and sustainable systems and structures in place that stand up to scrutiny. Essentially what it boils down to is ensuring a consistency in quality – ultimately it's about guaranteeing all our pupils have access to the same great quality of provision and receive the best standard of education we can provide.

We didn't want to rush into anything, which is why we felt a hard federation was the right model for us at the time. The move to academisation feels like the next natural step. This hasn't been driven by political pressure. In our circumstances the move to academisation has been born out of the way we operate, which is very much in keeping with the way a MAT works. We can also see the benefits of controlling our own destiny.

“The advantage was that I could work on the ground to foster a collaborative and sustainable practice, whilst at the same overseeing the work of schools across their three sites. I would describe myself as the glue that holds the governance, 350 pupils and an equal number of staff together.”

Our senior teams have a long history of collaborative work, I've lost count of the schools we have supported over the last decade – and not just special schools or at schools in Birmingham.

Brays School has a wider national remit and works with professionals across England and beyond through its varying roles as a National Teaching School, a National Support School and a National School of Creativity.

Brays also holds a service level agreement with Birmingham Local Authority to provide support to professionals and

“The beauty of the hard federation model is that, while the SLTs can retain their schools' sense of individual identity, they also don't feel isolated.”

children and young people with physical difficulties across mainstream provision in the city.

One of our biggest strengths is our open-mindedness and willingness to share best practice. We don't profess to know it all, and we willingly reach out for support from other schools if we feel they can offer expertise we don't already

possess. Our alliance of partner schools all bring lots of wisdom, which we share collectively.

A key to our success is regular self-evaluation, risk assessment, seeking out best practice, as well as proper timely planning. We've applied all these qualities throughout the academisation process. We've held endless meetings with staff, parents, teaching and support unions – anyone that will be affected by the changes. It's about ensuring everyone is on board, that they feel part of the decision-making process. The last thing anyone needs are any shocks or surprises.

I think now's the time for schools across England to be prepared. They need to start planning for the future as Local Authorities' remits and budgets change, even if that is just starting a conversation and seeing where it leads.

Hamstead Hall Academy Trust:



The Trust was established in June 2013 and currently consists of two schools – Hamstead Hall Academy and Grestone Academy, both in Handsworth Wood.

Jonathan Mortimer, Head of School at Hamstead Hall Academy and Birmingham Education Partnership’s Secondary Representative for Perry Barr District:



When we decided to convert to academy status we knew that we wanted to simultaneously create a multi-academy trust.

We had two main catalysts behind our decision – the first being a strong desire to support Grestone Primary School, as it was known at the time, because it had been placed in special

measures in November 2012 after being rated ‘Inadequate’ by Ofsted.

Grestone is our main feeder school and we already had a strong relationship with the school. We felt we had a moral purpose to support the school and help it through a difficult time focusing on its leadership issues and working to ensure that standards and pupil attainment levels improved. Most of the students at Grestone become Hamstead Hall students so, for us to maintain high achievement at Hamstead Hall, it was vital that we helped Grestone to improve outcomes for the students there.

Secondly, Hamstead Hall, built in the 1960s, occupies an expansive site and the building was in desperate need of significant investment for repairs and renovations. Victims of the Coalition Government’s decision to scrap Labour’s Building Schools for the Future scheme and with the Local Authority unable to put forward any funding, we realised that by becoming an academy we would open up opportunities for new revenue streams which could ensure our school buildings were fit for the 21st Century. Since conversion in June 2013, we have secured over £3 million in funding to renovate, repair, modernise and develop our facilities.

Our decision to academise, therefore, was not a political one and has not changed our ethos, our core values or how we operate. We were motivated by the knowledge that the underlying reason we were making the changes was to protect the future of both schools and improve the education of thousands of pupils.

We have also been no strangers to working in collaboration with other schools in a variety of different networks. With a significant change in the role of Local Authorities over the previous few years, it is more important than ever to form close links with other schools.

Hamstead Hall has a proud history of providing school-to-school support and we were one of the first schools to be asked to be part of the former Department for Education and Skills’ Innovation Unit to support schools locally and nationally. Collaborating with other schools enables staff to share good practice and learn from other schools and helps raise standards for everyone involved. It also allows

schools to facilitate professional development opportunities which can help to retain high quality staff in a time when recruitment of teachers is at its most challenging.

During the specialist schools programme, we had a number of specialisms in areas such as Sports, Maths and Computing, providing outreach work and support for schools.

Hamstead Hall is also part of the Arthur Terry Teaching School Alliance - a partnership of 22 schools in the West Midlands. Staff from Hamstead Hall work with other staff from the Alliance to design and deliver CPD programmes with a focus on developing teaching, learning and leadership.

“*Our decision to academise was not a political one and has not changed our ethos, our core values or how we operate.*”



We also contribute to their School Centred Initial Teacher Training course (SCITT), hosting trainee teachers and helping to mould the way new teachers are being trained in schools. As members and partners of a variety of other networks and organisations such as BEP, Titan and RSA Teaching School Alliance, we have a wealth of experience of working with others and strongly believe in the process of collaboration.

Over the last few years we have been working on an incredibly exciting innovative language development project, called 'How language works'. This has been a significant focus across the Trust and underpinned our improvement strategy. Most of our students have English as an Additional Language (EAL) and this is an intensive, long-term strategy to improve how all students can access and use appropriate academic language as part of their learning. The impact for students has been marked with results improving year-on-year at both academies in the MAT.

Our work here has attracted a lot of attention - locally through our conferences and work with BEP and the Arthur Terry Teaching School Alliance, nationally with the Open University and through sharing our work with schools across the country, and internationally through our link with Hong Kong University where researchers visit Hamstead Hall and Grestone twice a year to research and report on our work in this area. Colleagues from Hamstead Hall have presented

at national conferences on how to improve the acquisition of language and this is an area we are keen to collaborate on further with other schools and institutions.

I am a firm believer in the opportunities that can be created by working in collaboration, no matter what form that alliance or partnership may take.

For us, there have been many benefits to being a MAT enabling us to work more closely with our local primary school and securing funding to improve the buildings in both academies, but it is a small part of our overall strategy for how we work and collaborate with other schools and institutions.

The Trust holds ultimate responsibility for all decisions regarding the running of the individual academies within our MAT. However, whilst finance, HR, estates, ICT, admissions and marketing are managed centrally, the Trust delegates decisions relating to the curriculum and learning and teaching to the local governing bodies of the academies in order for them to retain their sense of individuality. Opportunities are also given to share best practice and to participate in shared opportunities for professional development.

As we look to the future we want to build on our strengths and provide the widest possible range of opportunities for our students, teachers, paraprofessionals and the community to feel fulfilled in their lifelong learning.

As a small MAT, we have no current plans to expand but will continue to ensure that we work and collaborate with others, building on existing partnerships and forming new networks which are in the best interests of the students and staff of Hamstead Hall Academy Trust.

The Learning Trust For Excellence (LTE):



The Learning Trust for Excellence (LTE) comprises seven schools based in Sutton Coldfield: Coppice Primary School, Four Oaks Primary School, Langley Special School, Little Sutton Primary School, Hollyfield Primary School, Moor Hall Primary School, Whitehouse Common Primary School and their partners Beaufort Special School, Birmingham City University, King Edward VI Schools, Rotary and University College Birmingham.

Rachel Davis, chair of The Learning Trust for Excellence and Head Teacher of Little Sutton Primary School:



Co-operative Trusts and Co-operative Academies offer increasingly popular alternatives for schools considering their future. The schools that are in our Trust are Local Authority maintained and retain their independence, but gain advantages from working as part of a wider collaboration.

Partners are engaged to strengthen the leadership and governance and offer enrichment opportunities to staff and children to help raise standards.

By forming a Co-operative Trust each school retains its autonomy and governing body whilst at the same time offering exciting opportunities for its pupils, staff and wider community through the power of collaboration. This

was crucial for the LTE schools as they considered their options in a political environment dominated by on-going educational reform.

As a group of high achieving schools with experienced head teachers, it was important to be proactive in responding to the landscape; however, retaining what is unique and special about each school was a priority – after all, this is what makes the schools successful.

Having worked well together in the past, the schools were highly motivated to learn from the strengths of each other, share excellent practice and engage partners to help them to be the best they can be. The Co-operative model offers that opportunity. The collaboration has had a significant impact on the development of teaching and learning within the Trust schools.

Alongside this, the schools have realised considerable savings and efficiencies through sharing resources and joint

“*Having worked well together in the past, the schools were highly motivated to learn from the strengths of each other, share excellent practice and engage partners to help them to be the best they can be.*”

“ *Alongside this, the schools have realised considerable savings and efficiencies through sharing resources and joint procurement. Both teaching and non-teaching staff at all levels within the schools have been encouraged to work together to share excellent practice, develop new initiatives and address local and national agendas.* ”

procurement. Both teaching and non-teaching staff at all levels within the schools have been encouraged to work together to share excellent practice, develop new initiatives and address local and national agendas.

A variety of working groups have been formed involving curriculum leaders, bursars, governors and head teachers. Current priorities for the different groups include: assessment and moderation, mastery in maths, reading, EYFS, special education needs, business support and science. Furthermore, significant training opportunities have been provided for staff and parents as well as enrichment opportunities for pupils.

The LTE schools use the collaboration to deliver their own school improvement supported by a rigorous review process to ensure high standards are constantly maintained. The head teachers undertake regular reviews in each of the schools in the Trust. Each review involves robust data interrogation, interviews with SLTs, lesson observations, book reviews and pupil conferencing.

Evidence based feedback is provided, highlighting strengths and identifying areas for improvement. Schools are subsequently held to account for addressing these. As well as delivering tangible outcomes for the schools and the children, this ‘critical friend’ intervention enables the whole school to confidently feel “Ofsted ready” and have a clear understanding of what to expect. This has also helped to embed monitoring and self-evaluation techniques within schools.

Recently the school reviews have been developed further with the creation of a safeguarding review to ensure schools are addressing all current requirements and expectations. The LTE received a Leading Aspect Award in recognition of the impact of the wide range of collaborative work and look forward to exciting opportunities ahead.

Ninestiles Academy Trust:



Ninestiles School became one of Birmingham's first 'converter' academies in January 2011.

The Ninestiles Academy Trust currently comprises six schools in Birmingham and Solihull, with Cockshut Hill Technology College set to join in September 2016.

Ninestiles An Academy is the lead school in this multi-academy trust, while the remainder of the MAT consists of Erdington Hall Primary School, The Oaklands Primary School, Pegasus Primary School, Yarnfield Primary School and Lyndon Secondary School.

Ninestiles An Academy is an 'Outstanding' secondary school with a long and proud history of providing school-to-school support both locally and across the country.

In 2012 it was designated as a National Support School, while the Trust has also developed The Ninestiles Teaching Alliance - a teaching school which has developed a strong alliance of more 30 schools.

“*We strive for improvement by building strong partnerships with our board of directors and local academy councillors, with collaborative working an integral part of our success.*”

Martyn Collin, Interim CEO at Ninestiles Academy Trust and Executive Principal (Primary):

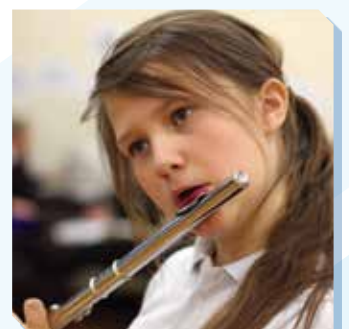


We focus on every pupil being able to achieve their potential and through that, have high performing schools that are proud of their achievements and have the capacity to continue to improve.

Our mission is simple: to be excellent in everything we do. Our goal is to improve on our previous best and to provide outstanding learning experiences and outcomes for pupils and students.

At the heart of everything we do is the focus on building a strong partnership, secured on challenge and mutual support.

We strive for improvement by building strong partnerships with our board of directors and local academy councillors, with collaborative working an integral part of our success. A benefit of working with a number of schools across the age range is the





potential to highlight and share excellent practice. It's so essential that we see it as one of our key roles to ensure best practice is shared as easily as possible in order for us to learn off each other and work together to ensure there is an unremitting focus on improvement.

As a trustee of Birmingham Education Partnership and a National Leader in Education, I am fully committed to helping build a school-led system that will help to position this city as a leader in educational excellence.

Nishkam School Trust:



Nishkam School Trust (NST) was established in 2011 and consists of four schools – Nishkam Primary School and Nishkam High School, both in Birmingham, Nishkam School West London, and Nishkam Primary School in Wolverhampton. It also manages two independent nurseries in Birmingham and Wolverhampton. A third nursery will be opening shortly in West London.

Brinder Mahon, CEO:



The Trust has grown over a period of 40 years from a series of community education initiatives at universities, supplementary schools and overseas educational institutions and endeavours.

Originally, the Trust arose out of a Sikh faith charity, Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha

(GNNSJ), which was founded in the 1970s in Handsworth, Birmingham. Based on prayer and selfless service (Nishkam), Soho Road Gurudwara (our place of worship) serves 20,000 free meals every week. In addition, over the last two decades GNNSJ has developed an international multi-faith track record.

Those behind the Trust have a history stemming back to 1993 working with the government to find ways of providing community-led schools in deprived areas. The Trust's vision is to empower our children with values enabling them to be good human beings to excel both

academically and spiritually to serve humanity selflessly for the common good with an abundance of love, compassion and forgiveness.

Over the last 20 years, we have lived in a world where a mistrust of each other is ever increasing. In addition, in 2007 a Unicef report on child well-being in rich countries placed the UK bottom out of 21 of the world's richest nations when looking at child well-being.

To tackle this concern at its core, the Trust aspired to develop an educational system based not only on academic excellence but also on a foundation of values common to all – regardless of faith - to help raise hope, trust, and faith in each other and the world around us.

These values will lead to both strong educational outcomes as well as providing the building blocks for cohesive families and communities in Birmingham – and ultimately a strong and united Britain.

We believe that the Sikh principles are uniquely placed for such an educational system because at the core of this philosophy there is no desire to convert or evangelise. In the Sikh tradition, we believe that it's not enough just to tolerate the other, but moreover to uphold and support other faith traditions, as a brotherhood of humanity originating from the same divine root.

It is on this basis that the Trust's educational philosophy is delivered through a strong multi-faith, values-driven ethos, open to all pupils - irrelevant of background.

In our schools, the faith of every individual is equally cherished – which is a faith school model which we believe is unchartered and goes far beyond the traditional single faith school model.

In our model, pupils are instilled in common faith values to become not only life-long learners, but positive contributors to society with a greater purpose in life. Many parents often comment that their children come home bringing a strong sense of love for not only learning, but love for others.

With this shared deeper understanding and respect for one another across faiths, truly cohesive communities will be founded. We, in modern Britain, can ill-afford to take the approach of a form of state secularism - as in parts of Europe - where the 'apparent' differences of the other are not understood, explored or genuinely respected. The inevitable consequence deepens mistrust and leads to communities divided through ignorance and misunderstanding.

We believe strongly in a collaborative approach to education - none of us individually has all the answers. Combining our strengths and weaknesses increases exponentially the rate at which we improve and challenge ourselves. This is particularly important considering the tremendous pace of change at all levels of the educational landscape. This approach allows us structured peer-to-peer development, mentoring, moderation and challenge, which we believe is a key strength.

This internal collaboration is further enhanced through other formal and informal partnerships with the Department for Education, Local Authorities, the Jubilee Centre for Character and Values at the University of Birmingham and the University of Birmingham Free School.

As with any new organisation our key to success has been forming and empowering teams of teaching and non-teaching senior leaders to create a clear vision, providing a delivery strategy with agreed key performance indicators which we augment with robust and rigorous quality assurance procedures.

Critical and accurate self-analysis has allowed growth and improvement to take place at pace that has meant that two of our schools were graded 'Outstanding' by Ofsted in a short space of time.

The complexities are enormous and endless. They include, but are not confined to, creating new school environments and infrastructure, recruiting good staff at all levels, devising outstanding curricula and assessment in a time of immense change, ensuring accountability and transparency and, most importantly, recruiting pupils when we are operating a new school with little track record.

However, of significant importance in achieving our goals, is a deep belief and drive that our educational approach will enhance the life chances of the students we serve now and in generations to come.

We have found that there are multiple benefits to being a Trust. Firstly it has allowed us to enrich the national curriculum with a values-led approach.

We've also been able to devise systems and processes that are cost effective and allow a greater proportion of funding to go towards learning and teaching, rather than infrastructure and administration.

It has allowed us to work directly with community volunteers – leading to stakeholder input which has meant that we are able to provide far more to serve our students than we could have ever hoped to achieve independently.

However, there are pitfalls to running a Trust. Accountability is significantly, and rightly, high and takes considerable time and resource.

As we look to the future, we believe in quality rather than quantity. Whilst there is opportunity to grow further, our preference is to build a long-term, sustainable organisation. We will accomplish that by achieving the high benchmarks we set ourselves in the first instance. As our confidence grows in meeting our benchmarks, we will potentially consider further growth in the future.

In our schools, the faith of every individual is equally cherished – which is a faith school model which we believe is unchartered and goes far beyond the traditional single faith school model.

Plantsbrook Learning Trust:



Plantsbrook School is a Secondary School in Sutton Coldfield which became an early academy converter in August 2011, one month before being judged as 'Outstanding' by Ofsted. Its head teacher was appointed as a National Leader in Education and the school a National Support School in 2012.

In 2013, Plantsbrook gained Teaching School Status. The Plantsbrook Teaching School Alliance is made up of nine schools across Birmingham and Staffordshire. When nearby Town Junior School was rated as 'Requires Improvement' in January 2014, Plantsbrook agreed to sponsor Town Junior within a multi-academy trust.

Tracy Campbell, Executive Head Teacher:



When Plantsbrook School decided to go through the process of converting to an academy in 2011, I have to be honest, my main motivation was purely pragmatic: at that time, our school budget was set to gain an extra £500,000 from the Local Authority's top slice by converting.

In the years since, however, I have come to appreciate some of the additional freedoms which have come with academy status - but I don't believe fundamentally we have changed very much as a school. Certainly, pupils, parents and most staff, other than the finance team, really wouldn't notice the difference. We have kept our admissions policy

the same; we follow the same terms and conditions for staff and, most importantly, our inclusive ethos has not altered.

Being an academy coincided with us being graded 'Outstanding' by Ofsted, and subsequently becoming a National Support School and Teaching School. These changes took us out of our comfort zone, but I think in retrospect, helped our confidence to grow.

Not relying on the Local Authority and 'shopping around' for the best services was undoubtedly an advantage of these changes at the time. When Town Junior, one of our main feeder schools, received a 'Requires Improvement' judgement, we began supporting it under our role as a National Support School.

Governors and the newly appointed Head Teacher Adrienne Smith, decided to approach Plantsbrook with the view to us sponsoring Town Junior as part of a MAT. As we were starting to build a good relationship with the school, we agreed to do so.

The imperative for me was a moral one – the overwhelming majority of the children attending Town Junior will, at age 11, become Plantsbrook's children. In the 18 months since the MAT was established, both schools have continued to improve and Town Junior now feels very much like a 'Good' school.

The vision statement for our small, but beautifully formed, MAT is to create a strong, caring and aspirational community of schools. We aim to provide all of our young people with outstanding educational experiences.

We want to nurture, value and inspire them to develop a life-long love of learning and to flourish. When the conditions are right, we will grow our community, for the benefit of all of our young people. Both schools in our MAT have the same systems in some areas, most notably, finance and HR, which run from Plantsbrook, and our performance management is the same across both schools.

This has meant that we have been able to make savings at a time when they are very much needed. Other systems have been adapted by Town Junior from the system already in place at Plantsbrook, such as our school improvement plan and our monitoring and evaluation systems.

However, Town Junior has 'tweaked' these to make them more appropriate for a primary setting. If other schools want to join our MAT in the future, those systems are now in place and are fully developed for both phases.

We have retained our links with the Local Authority and both schools are active members of Birmingham Education Partnership and other networks. We very much believe that collaboration is crucial as we move towards a school-led system.

It hasn't always been easy on either side but we have built a strong, trusting relationship across both schools. As Town Junior has improved, we have taken greater advantage of its expertise in a number of curricular areas, such as literacy, and we are now learning from its staff.

The relationship is much more equitable and we genuinely now feel much more like one team.

Adrienne Smith, Head Teacher, Town Junior School, Sutton Coldfield:



When I first became the Head Teacher at Town Junior School I thought it would be a stroll in the park - a few tweaks here and there and I would have the school on the path to recovery. But I soon realised the reality was different and I had a huge mountain to climb. The decision to become an academy sponsored by Plantsbrook School was taken with the

We want to nurture, value and inspire our children to develop a life-long love of learning and to flourish. When the conditions are right, we will grow our community, for the benefit of all of our young people.

realisation that it was not possible to move the school out of RI quickly enough without that support. After a lot of hard work - with many ups and downs - we feel as though the summit of the mountain is in sight.

The behaviour of the children and appointing new staff have meant that the quality of teaching and learning has improved significantly and opportunities to widen the curriculum have added to the feel that Town Junior is a 'Good' school.

All systems are now securely in place and, with a school effectiveness framework and a school improvement plan now written, which link closely to a monitoring and evaluation cycle, it is possible to drill down many aspects of school improvement at a rapid pace so that we feel totally equipped to complete the final part of our journey.

Whilst there have been occasions when our collaboration has been taxing, we have not introduced anything in the last three years that we have had to abandon because the systems do not transfer from secondary to primary and have not moved the school forward. However the SLTs from both schools have had to make

allowances and changes to enable these systems to be effective and this has been a massive learning curve.

The collaboration between the schools has definitely benefited the children of Town Junior, who have been able to access specialist teaching, resources and opportunities that were impossible before. We are now in a position where we are starting to provide opportunities for students, teachers and teaching assistants from Plantsbrook School to learn from us.

The capacity provided by Plantsbrook School through the MAT has enabled this joint collaboration to be a true success, changing the outcomes for all the children and staff connected to Plantsbrook Learning Trust.

Prince Albert Community Trust (PACT):



PACT is a relatively new MAT, currently consisting of three schools – Prince Albert Junior and Infant School in Aston; Heathfield Primary School in Handsworth; and Highfield Junior and Infant School in Saltley.

Sajid Gulzar, Executive Head Teacher and CEO:



I became head teacher at Prince Albert back in September 2009, when the school was deemed ‘Satisfactory’ by Ofsted. Within a year we secured a ‘Good’ rating and then in February 2015 we were immensely proud when the school was rated ‘Outstanding’.

Meanwhile, the Local Authority asked me to go into Heathfield in February 2013 after the school found itself in difficulty. My role was only ever supposed to be temporary, however, it quickly became apparent that the problems were much graver than we had anticipated and the school was on the brink of being placed in special measures.

We had to use far more resources from Prince Albert than first anticipated as number of colleagues began working across both schools. We realised we had a real moral responsibility to the school’s 450 pupils who had, up until then, been systematically failed.

By February 2014, the Local Authority had served a warning notice on Heathfield’s governing body and that’s when the school joined forces with Prince Albert to work together as a hard federation with one single governing body serving the two schools. Thanks to a dedicated team, we saw rapid improvement in a short period of time at Heathfield and we eventually decided to become a MAT – we knew we had the skills to help other struggling schools.

In September 2015, Prince Albert and Heathfield converted to academy status and Prince Albert Community Trust was born with a clear vision and strong belief in working collaboratively, which is even reflected in our strapline ‘United We Are World Class’.

It was around this time that another struggling school, Highfield Junior & Infant, was brought to our attention. It had been placed in special measures and rated by Ofsted as ‘Inadequate’ in September 2014.

We felt it was a strong match for our MAT in terms of its issues; it was similar territory to what we experienced at Heathfield - and the special measures label didn’t worry us. I was delighted when its Interim Executive Board voted PACT to take over as Highfield’s sponsor, not only because it marked a milestone for the growth of our MAT, but also because I had attended the school myself as a child.

My parents were first generation immigrants from Pakistan and I arrived at Highfield in 1978 as a four-year-old pupil speaking barely two words of English. They instilled in me the value of education and its transformational power and I think it’s my own background and experiences coupled with

the tremendously talented people I work with that enables us to drive school improvement.

What's worked really well for our MAT is sharing our expertise across the three sites, as well as developing systems that can be implemented Trust-wide. While we work to ensure each school retains its unique character and identity, we don't want to have to reinvent the wheel every time we make a structural or strategic decision. Pooling resources and expertise allows head teachers to focus solely on school improvement without having to worry about the site or HR issues for example.

We're also on our own learning journey, having achieved far more rapid improvements at Highfield than we did at Heathfield despite it being a much larger school.

As an NLE I have to be satisfied that our schools are in safe hands whilst I am out supporting elsewhere. In this regard, we have built significant leadership capacity, at the heart of which is our focus on developing our own staff so that they can grow their careers without having to leave the Trust.

It's imperative we make the right decisions and do not attempt to grow the Trust too quickly. We have the capacity to support additional schools and believe we can make a telling difference in schools that are struggling. Many of our staff have developed expertise in a particular field and had the opportunity to work across a number of schools.

What this extra capacity also means is that we can be assured of a quick turnaround at Highfield and we can continue to focus on our plans to open a brand new secondary free school.

Prince Albert High School should open in September 2019 and it is an exciting project we are developing with the Schools of King Edward VI in Birmingham and Aston University.

My advice to schools looking for a sponsor is to do their research - don't be afraid to go to schools that you know have previously worked with the MAT, find out what others have made of their experience in terms of school-to-school support.

Meanwhile we have learned many lessons about how to choose which schools to sponsor. Due diligence is essential. As a small MAT, it would be difficult for us to build infrastructure if we were taking on a school with significant debt. We understand the importance of a school retaining

its own flavour and uniqueness, something we feel we are able to do whilst helping it to improve the quality of education for its pupils.



Creating a MAT has undoubtedly been a challenge, particularly in terms of dealing with the financial side which is a whole world away from leading a maintained school. We have quickly discovered that there is a significant workload involving finances, particularly regarding accountability and the change in governance. It is essential therefore that the Trustees are appointed on the basis of their understanding of academy governance and accountability and the importance of their role in providing challenge, support and compliance.

We have the capacity to support additional schools and believe we can make a telling difference in schools that are struggling.

We want to raise aspirations, not only for pupils but also staff and the whole communities we serve. We have more than 2,000 children at our three schools and I have the same high expectations for all of them. We understand that from time to time some of our children and families experience very challenging circumstances.

But we are clear in our belief that there is no excuse for under-achievement and, regardless of their situation, all of our pupils can and will fulfil their potential.

I am confident that all of our schools will be excellent institutions, which I would be proud to send my own children to. We are really excited about the future for not only the schools currently part of our Trust but those that will join us as we gradually grow over the next five to ten years. We don't know for sure what is in store, but we are confident we are developing a Trust that is both successful and sustainable.

Robin Hood Multi Academy Trust:



Robin Hood Multi Academy Trust was officially formed in July 2016 and currently has two schools: Robin Hood Academy and Cedars Academy.

Steve Taylor, Executive Head Teacher:



In the past five years, Robin Hood Academy has specialised in school-to-school support and so creating a MAT seemed a natural progression to ensure that we can create lasting partnerships and build upon the effective work that has already taken place.

Within the current educational climate we are seeing more and more examples of schools formally working together with each MAT having specific ways of operating.

“*At Robin Hood our goal is to create a MAT which links like-minded schools together to create an inspiring learning experience for all of the children - regardless of which school they attend.*”

“*We believe that operating as a MAT will give us a bright future where we work with a range of people who share similar philosophies.*”

At Robin Hood our goal is to create a MAT which links like-minded schools together to create an inspiring learning experience for all of the children - regardless of which school they attend.

Our driving principle is that we want to work with schools who have an open mindset and are interested in breaking some of the traditional approaches to education.

We pride ourselves on innovation, taking risks and operating creatively. It is important that, regardless of Ofsted grades, we work with schools who believe in deviating from the educational norm and instead choose to be part of a collective team that creates a system that we fully believe in.

When we set up the MAT we were very clear that we were not going to target a set number of schools because, for us, it is about the quality of how we operate rather than focusing on the volume of schools we are working with.

We believe in growing capacity within each school and celebrating their individuality – we have decided that we want to nurture individuality rather than impose a set blueprint on every school that works with us.

One of the underlying foundations of how we operate is that we want to encourage schools and their staff to take risks, embrace when things don't go according to plan and then evaluate and refine their practice.

If you choose to join a MAT and pick the correct one then it need not be about losing autonomy or independence. It should be about working collaboratively and sharing best practice in a formal relationship.

In reality, whether you choose to set up a MAT or join one, the key thing is that you work with schools that share your values.



If you choose to join a MAT and pick the correct one then it need not be about losing autonomy or independence. It should be about working collaboratively and sharing best practice in a formal relationship.



No school is perfect and Robin Hood Academy certainly isn't, but our key strength is our ability to embrace mistakes and use them as a learning opportunity for improvement.

We believe that operating as a MAT will give us a bright future where we work with a range of people who share similar philosophies.

There were a number of pitfalls that we hit when setting up the MAT and I'd advise schools who are thinking of doing this to:

- Be clear about your underlying principles for setting up the MAT;
- Evaluate whether or not you have the internal capacity to lead a MAT;
- Decide upon the leadership structure of the MAT;
- Have your eyes open when dealing with the Department for Education and be strong in who you will and won't take on. The DfE has different drivers to schools and it is important that you are well versed on the type of schools you are looking to work with;
- Invest time in creating systems and procedures – scaling up from how one school operates to a full MAT means ensuring consistency;
- Don't expect to know it all. It can be a minefield so make sure you call on colleagues or seek out specialists in their field to help you.



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