

Diocesan Multi Academy Trusts:

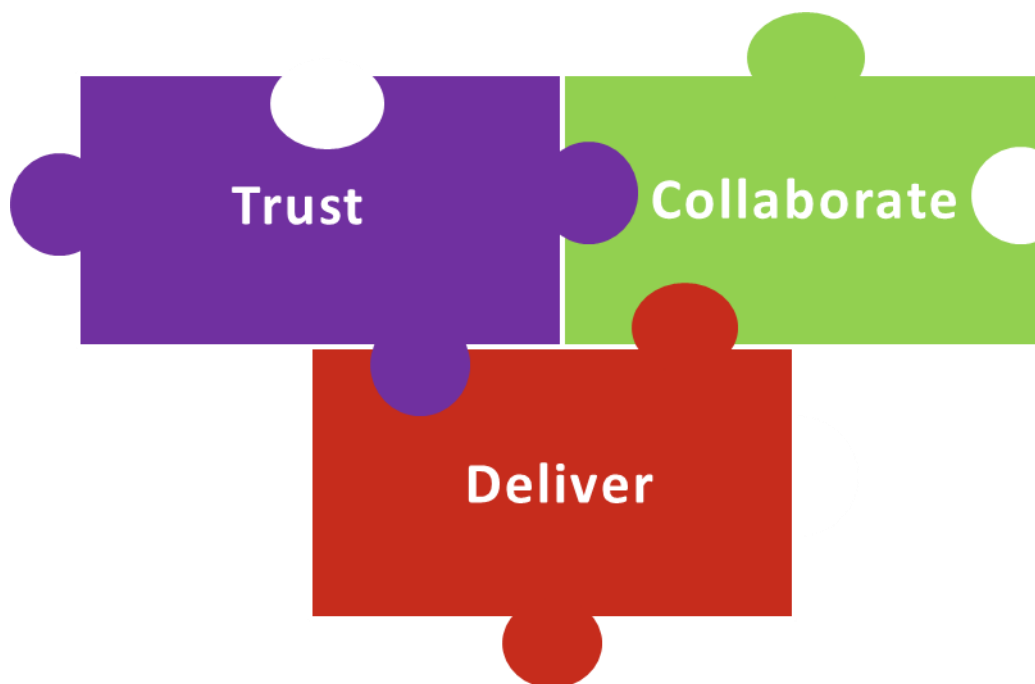
Why do 'Good' and 'Outstanding' schools choose to join?

Context

In 2012-2013 a number of Diocesan Multi Academy Trusts (DMATs) were formed. Many had the expectation and understanding that they would only ever be required to sponsor schools that were placed in an Ofsted category. The national academy agenda evolved and in parallel a number of church schools that weren't in a category expressed interest in joining existing Diocesan Trusts. DMATs realised the benefit of having a MAT comprised of all schools, regardless of Ofsted category; reinforcing their diocesan view and the Church's broader view of educating and supporting all children.

Since then a number of dioceses now have a range of schools within their DMATs. In exploring this further an event was held in November 2015 which included guest speakers from three Dioceses, case studies and interactive group sessions. After the event a number of dioceses with a range of schools within their MAT have articulated the story of their Trust's development.

This document coheres both the event and the diocesan discussions within three core themes that consistently emerged. The three themes are interconnected and are useful building blocks as other dioceses explore their academy Trust's activity.



Trust

Diocesan Values and Vision

- Trust in the diocesan family is cited as the key driver for good and outstanding schools to want to join a DMAT.
- Schools already feel part of the diocesan family and therefore joining a DMAT is a natural extension of this relationship.
- Joining a DMAT is seen as a way of strengthening the Christian ethos of a school.
- Joining a DMAT is seen as embracing the mission to nurture the whole child, encouraging them to flourish as a child of God; spiritually, morally, socially, culturally as well as academically.
- The diocese 'brand' is trusted by church and non-church schools.
- Part of this 'brand' is the positive relationships between Diocesan personnel, Headteachers and governors.
- Trust with governing bodies and other stakeholders needs to be maintained through meaningful partnership working.
- Effective quality assurance processes enable individual schools within the DMAT to be confident that any external providers, whether operational or school improvement focused, model the values, philosophy and practices both of the DMAT and individual schools.
- A continual process of assuring this alignment ensures there is no corrosion of trust.
- Schools trust their DMATs to make tough decisions in the interests of all pupils, when necessary.

Derby Diocesan Academy Trust (DDAT):

Trusted relationships are at the heart of DDAT's philosophy. The schools rated good and outstanding who joined DDAT early on have been part of shaping solutions along the way and have been key to DDAT's development. The Trust aligns Christian Distinctiveness with ensuring school improvement and pupil outcomes drive decision making at all levels. Delivering a highly credible school improvement offer has been crucial to the Trust's success, with an outstanding school citing this as a top reason for joining DDAT. Through extensive conversations with governors DDAT has developed a Scheme of Delegation that works for schools in different categories, enabling autonomy and accountability that's right across all schools.

Collaborate

Governing Bodies:

- Building and maintaining relationships with governors is key to shaping the solutions for schools.
- Taking time in discussion with governors, exploring academy options and developing a collaborative approach from the beginning is invaluable in attracting good and outstanding schools to DMATs.
- Well written protocols and Schemes of Delegation for the academies are crucial to the academies and DMAT's success.
- Agreeing the level of autonomy for schools in different categories is very important to ensure governance is appropriate.
- Considering what will happen should the categorisation of the school change and what affects the change of category for the purpose of the Scheme of Delegation, e.g., what happens if education elements are deemed 'good', but finance is weak.

Schools:

- When talking with schools about the DMAT, Headteacher colleagues valued the DMAT sharing both the positive and negative aspects of joining a MAT.
- Diocesan colleagues felt that the best advocates for a DMAT were other schools; creating opportunities for existing MAT schools to share their experiences can be beneficial.
- Enabling collaboration and developmental opportunities for schools within the DMAT is another reason cited by Headteacher colleagues as important when considering joining the DMAT.
- Forums for a range of personnel in schools e.g., Business Managers; Chair of Governors; subject leaders etc these can develop tangible collaborations between schools.

Diocese of Bristol Academies Trust (DBAT):

The Trust first focused on delivering sound school improvement support. This strategy has worked with the DBAT School Improvement Officer trusted by schools to deliver effective school improvement. As well as the school improvement monitoring and evaluation visits, the SIP works in schools supporting them in delivering their school improvement plan; staff development plan and leadership development plans through a coaching model. One of the next steps for the trust is to further develop school to school support; ensuring collaboration and capacity continue to develop across the Trust.

The Diocese of Gloucester Academies Trust (DGAT):

DGAT's vision for excellence recognises the importance of a collaborative approach and in designing flexible models of working to fully utilise the expertise within local schools. DGAT provides a rigorous school improvement service via Academy Development partners and utilises Headteachers within DGAT who are Ofsted trained. Development opportunities range from access to a change management course; a 6 day 'good to outstanding' teaching programme and research projects. One of the enablers of collaboration for the Trust is a series of forums for school's personnel, as well as pupil focused initiatives such as 'Philosophy for Children'.

Deliver

School Improvement

- Having credible and respected School Improvement Partners / Advisers in place delivering a robust service is cited as a fundamental reason for good / outstanding schools to join a DMAT.
- Having a school improvement strategy that is explicitly underpinned by Christian Distinctiveness can ensure that School Improvement and Christian Distinctiveness are not viewed as mutually exclusive.
- Clarity over what schools get as part of the school improvement package is vital e.g., how many visits, what the scope of support will look like etc.

Operations

- For existing personnel there may be issues with capacity or knowledge, resulting in steep learning curves.
- Exploring different ways of obtaining capacity and knowledge through quality assured consultants and flexible staff until the DMAT reaches a sustainable level can be beneficial.
- The close relationship between the DMAT and the DBE must be carefully thought through in terms of protocols and ways of working e.g., secondment contracts.
- Robust and rigorous processes for supporting schools with finance, HR, buildings and health and safety are vital for schools to continue to trust the DMAT and for the DMAT to meet its responsibilities.

Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies Trust (DNEAT):

Many of the schools in DNEAT, rated good or outstanding, joined after strategically thinking about their sustainability and long term vision. Valuing and trusting the diocese, the schools joined the DNEAT very comfortable that they would flourish in line with the shared vision. This includes a belief in the positive impact of autonomous schools, working in a network of professional support and challenge. Part of the support and challenge occurs through 3 regional hubs, with 'Standards' sub-committees of the Trust board operating within each of these to ensure accountability. Good and outstanding schools continue to join DNEAT citing confidence in this school improvement hub model as a key reason. School to school support work is beginning to emerge across DNEAT, which will continue to grow. DNEAT has started to consider talent spotting and succession planning.

Diocese of Coventry Multi Academy Trust

The delivery of sound school improvement through a trusted School Improvement Partner has been vital to the effective development of the MAT. Making sure the academies continue to make sustainable improvements ensures the MAT's reputation continues to grow. The School Improvement Partner has developed effective best practice sharing across the MAT and school to school support has grown organically and latterly explicitly with the development of system leaders. The Trust is now focusing on recruitment and retention of staff and a leadership development journey for teachers and leaders working within the MAT.

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