

Education Committee

Oral evidence: [Multi-Academy Trusts](#), HC 204

Wednesday 13 July 2016

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Neil Carmichael (Chair); Lucy Allan; Michelle Donelan; Suella Fernandes; Lucy Frazer; Catherine McKinnell; Ian Mearns; Stephen Timms.

Questions 128 - 221

Witnesses

I: Sir Steve Lancashire, Chief Executive, REAch2 Academy Trust, David Moran, Chief Executive, E-ACT, Lucy Heller, Chief Executive, Ark, and Barbara Daykin, Executive Head Teacher, Little Mead Academy Trust

II: Councillor Richard Watts, Vice-Chair of the Children and Young People Board, Local Government Association, Emma Knights, Chief Executive, National Governors' Association, Chris Keates, General Secretary, NASUWT, and Russell Hobby, General Secretary, National Association of Head Teachers.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [REAch2 Academy Trust](#)
- [Ark](#)
- [Little Mead Academy Trust](#)
- [Local Government Association](#)
- [National Governors' Association](#)
- [NASUWT](#)
- [National Association of Head Teachers](#)

Examination of Witnesses

Sir Steve Lancashire, David Moran, Lucy Heller and Barbara Daykin.

Q128 Chair: Good morning and welcome to this session on multi-academy trusts. Our purpose is to explore how we can create the best multi-academy trusts; what does a good multi-academy trust look like? We hope to be reporting on that towards the end of the year, and your contributions to this debate will be hugely appreciated. With that in mind, would you like to say who you are and what you are representing, starting off with Sir Steve Lancashire?

Sir Steve Lancashire: Steve Lancashire, Chief Executive of the REAch2 Academy Trust, a family of 53 primary academies across the country.

Lucy Heller: Lucy Heller, Chief Executive of Ark. We have 34 schools in London, Birmingham, Hastings and Portsmouth.

David Moran: David Moran, Chief Executive of E-ACT multi-academy trust. We have 23 academies across England.

Barbara Daykin: I am Barbara Daykin. I am the Chief Executive of Little Mead Academy Trust in Bristol. We have two schools and are seeking to grow.

Q129 Chair: We have a good range there, from the very big to the very small, but obviously all are multi-academy trusts with different structures, different aspirations and so forth. We are looking forward to hearing what you say.

Essentially, have MATs grown too quickly? Is that the question we should be asking first, Steve?

Sir Steve Lancashire: I think if people looked at the growth of REAch2 they might ask that question. For us, the growth has been very considered, and I think it has been appropriate. We have a series of questions we ask ourselves when thinking about growth. One of them is about how effective we have been in the past with our schools, how quickly we can impact on our schools, and whether or not we have the capacity to do more.

There are four things here that are important. First, our schools are in regional clusters, and that is very important because they can collaborate with each other, but it also means that we can absolutely build a team around them to make the kind of intervention that we would need to. That is educational professionals, and it is also the services that the schools need. That whole local capacity around a cluster of schools is really important for us, which is why we have been effective to date.

Secondly, there is a really important question that we keep asking ourselves, and it is based on having a look at what happened to trusts in the past that perhaps did grow very quickly and very big. That question



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is: how well do we know our schools? We do a lot of work on answering that question, and it is about how effective our systems and processes are in giving us that information, whether that is to do with the data systems and how much progress children are making in our schools or whether it is the self-evaluation review inspection of our schools. It is about answering the question: are we taking enough action, and are our pupils making enough progress? What we have got absolutely right, and I think is very pertinent, is governance across the trust.

Chair: We are going to talk about governance later; that is a very important issue.

Sir Steve Lancashire: Sure.

Q130 **Chair:** David, would you like to comment on your MAT in terms of speed of growth?

David Moran: I believe that E-ACT today is unrecognisable from the organisation I walked into three years ago. I believe that E-ACT made mistakes prior to my joining. We have a new leadership team and a new board of trustees. We have a school improvement strategy and plan. I believe that the system has learned from the mistakes of—

Q131 **Chair:** Were those mistakes driven by or caused by speed of growth?

David Moran: Absolutely.

Q132 **Chair:** So you would say yes, there is a problem with speed of growth. It has to be, let us say, certainly steady, and in keeping with what?

David Moran: I think the speed of growth with a lack of strategy, a lack of a school improvement vision, a lack of an understanding of where the schools are, and a lack of transparent governance structures and systems and processes all combined to see the historic failure that was prevalent at E-ACT three years ago.

Q133 **Chair:** Can anybody shed any light on the question linking speed of growth with actual school performance?

David Moran: Three years ago, when I took over, over one in three of our schools were judged to be requiring special measures. Over one in three of our schools were failing to attain acceptable levels of attainment and achievement. I am pleased to report today that nearly 60% of our schools are now judged to be good or better. Our primary academies have seen a 15% improvement in headline attainment results. Results that have been published this week from the DfE and the Sutton Trust put our primary schools in the 15% most improved of all primary academies and our secondary schools attaining at an average level. There is clearly a lot more to do.

Q134 **Chair:** Did the Department for Education have any role to play, or did it effectively in some other way encourage speedy growth of MATs? Lucy, would you like to have a go at that?



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Lucy Heller: Yes. I think the Department was certainly encouraging speedy growth. It seemed to me that when you asked the question about whether there is a link between school performance and speed of MAT growth, the answer is obviously yes, but the missing part of the equation is about sponsor or MAT capacity. How fast you can grow depends really on what kind of resources and capacity you have internally. It depends very much on the mix of schools within the trust. It is quite clear that some trusts grew too fast. We have grown very carefully and steadily. We discovered to our cost one year when we think we grew too fast. I am pleased to say that the schools have done very well, but I think the central team nearly expired in the process. Yes, you have to be careful of this.

Q135 **Chair:** Barbara, you have not really grown at all. Do you have any plans to grow, or is this a deliberate decision not to grow?

Barbara Daykin: I think speed of growth is a critical consideration. Our MAT is two schools at the moment, and the rate of growth is a fundamental in our strategic plan. We are looking for measured growth, but what we are doing is driven by ambition for children. What we are seeing in our local area is that there is speed of growth that seems to be driven by more of a business model, but there is an issue there around the need for increased numbers to make it financially viable. You need to reach a tipping point before you are actually viable, and that is quite a problem, particularly around the sponsorship of small schools. We are seeking to grow. We are promoting ourselves, and it is becoming quite a challenge in the landscape at the moment with some of the bigger MATs operating in the area.

Q136 **Chair:** Lastly on this section, you have a local cluster model because you are a relatively local cluster MAT, but for those of you who have larger numbers of schools in your structure, local cluster models are clearly becoming quite popular. Do they work, Steve?

Sir Steve Lancashire: Yes, I think they do work. What they enable us to do is to make sure that there is sufficient capacity within that region. There are some things that are best delivered centrally and run across all our schools, but in terms of growth we very much take a decision about that local cluster and that local area, and whether there is sufficient capacity there. I think that is a really important thing.

One of the things that I think the Department for Education has got much better at is testing out the capacity of trusts to take on more schools. For a trust like us, where 80% of the academies are sponsored and previously were either below floor or failing, of course that requires a lot of capacity. We have very much focused on whether it is right to keep taking in sponsored academies, and we have changed our strategy to look more at converters and at free schools. That sensible growth of the type of academy is really important, too.

Q137 **Ian Mearns:** David, I very much got the impression from your answer to



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the question about the speed of growth that there were a number of things other than the speed of growth that you would have changed if you had been able to be there from the start. Would I be right in thinking that the geographical spread and the type of schools that you brought on board at the outset would have been different if you'd had a choice about it?

David Moran: Absolutely. I think the geographic spread is a key one, linking in with the discussion we have just had about clusters, where you can share capacity and best practice. I think about my Bristol schools. Ilminster Avenue E-ACT Academy was three years ago in special measures and in the bottom 2% in attainment and achievement of all schools nationally, and last year it was judged to be good, in the top 2% for value added. This year I expect it to be in the top 1%. The capacity that Steven has developed in that area allows the movement of outstanding practitioners quickly and simply. When I took over, there was a school in that cluster in Dartmouth, 248 miles away, and it is very difficult to share capacity at that length.

Q138 **Ian Mearns:** Trying to be an objective observer—which you are not, obviously—if you look back with hindsight, are you surprised that the DfE allowed the trust to grow in the way that it did, in the places where it did, with the sort of schools that it did?

David Moran: I am surprised. However, I think that the Department for Education learned lessons from a previous Administration and previous Ministers, and when I joined there was a change in Administration and the ministerial team. It became very much more focused on outcomes and capacity, which is clearly when E-ACT entered its pause period.

Q139 **Ian Mearns:** Is your advice for schools and trusts looking to grow to look for geographical complementarity, synergies, and support mechanisms that are mutual to one another?

David Moran: Absolutely. It has to be about the capacity to deliver the growth and evidence of impact on student outcomes.

Q140 **Ian Mearns:** On a totally different strand, the Committee has advocated that Ofsted be given the power to inspect multi-academy trusts. I think that the new chief inspector, when interviewed by us, suggested that that would be a good idea as well. Much evidence has been presented to the inquiry that agrees that this would make MATs much more accountable. Do you agree that MATs should be inspected by Ofsted?

Lucy Heller: I think in some senses MAT accountability is already pretty well covered by the inspection of individual schools, but I am entirely in favour of MATs being held accountable and having a detailed MAT focus in an Ofsted inspection.

Q141 **Ian Mearns:** Do you all think that is the case?

Sir Steve Lancashire: I agree. I am a big believer in accountability and transparency. We, as a trust, have recently had a visit from HMI and



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Ofsted and found the experience extremely constructive. It highlighted those things we did well, and I think that is important because it is incumbent on us to share that with other MATs. I think an inspector of MATs would help us do that.

David Moran: I think inspection is an integral part of any organisation's improvement. It has to be appropriate and fit for purpose for the organisation.

Q142 **Chair:** Yes, so you do think MATs should be inspected?

David Moran: I do, but I think it needs to be appropriate.

Chair: Barbara?

Barbara Daykin: Absolutely. I would love Ofsted to come and inspect my trust.

Q143 **Ian Mearns:** A couple of weeks ago we had Sir David Carter here with the current chief inspector, and we were talking then about the trust's role in school improvement and whether Ofsted should be looking at that. They were also talking about expansion and what criteria would be used for allowing a trust to expand. I put a scenario to David Carter: whether, if you had a five-school trust with three schools improving and two schools not, that be showing signs of improvement, and he seemed to suggest that it would. That seems to me to deny the fact that you might have three very good headteachers, three good leadership teams in three schools who are driving the schools forward, and two not. What is the trust's role in the overall scheme of things? I am not sure that anybody is looking at that effectively at the moment. What is your reaction to the Department's recent trust league tables?

David Moran: Getting accountability data out in the public is an excellent thing. It enables clarity and transparency about what matters. I think the debate that needs to happen is: are we measuring all the right things? There is a potential risk that we just measure the quantitative things, however important they are—and they are massively important—but there are also some more qualitative measures that we need to take into account. Then it is about how we visualise that information and use it to share best practice.

Lucy Heller: I think it is fantastic. This week or last week there has been a positive avalanche of data with the DfE tables, the EPI—the institute formerly known as Centre Forum—tables, the LSE has brought out papers and the Sutton Trust has done some work. They all add to the wealth of human knowledge, and it is incredibly important.

The only thing one would stress is that on the view of the academies movement as a whole, we are still very early in what is a hugely radical change to the system, particularly on converters, where the evidence seems to suggest that at least for any that were not outstanding to start with, things have not gone so well. It is early days. I think the feedback



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on the sponsored academies—the original ones—is clear. In terms of the MAT rankings, absolutely it should be out there.

Q144 **Ian Mearns:** We know that regional schools commissioners are responsible for particular regions, but they are also responsible for academy trusts, which can be across geographical regions. Do you think the regional schools commissioner ratings of MATs should be made public?

David Moran: Yes.

Sir Steve Lancashire: I think it should, yes. One of the things that we are constantly asking ourselves is how we can be better, and if there are trusts that are doing things better we need to learn from them. There is lots of collaboration between trusts in this country, just not enough, and I think that would encourage that.

Chair: Thank you very much. Catherine, it is now time to discuss the size of MATs.

Q145 **Catherine McKinnell:** The White Paper has said that the optimum size for a MAT is between 10 and 15 academies. Perhaps you would argue that the number of the academies is not as relevant as the number of students within the multi-academy trust. How does that statement impact on your future planning?

Barbara Daykin: In terms of our business plan, we are looking at growth up to five within the next three or four years. Beyond that, we have not really made any decisions. I think measured growth is what is absolutely important, going back to the question about growth. Rapid growth is dangerous, and we have focused on slow but carefully measured growth.

Sir Steve Lancashire: I absolutely agree that that is an optimum number. I probably work in pupil numbers—about 8,000—rather than number of schools. In particular, some of our primaries are very small, with 80-odd pupils in them. If you think about how REACh2 structured itself, it is in four hubs of about 15 schools, so as a model it is absolutely right. What is important is that that is reputable, and for large trusts wanting to operate nationally, operating on a reputable model is possible.

Lucy Heller: I would not particularly fetishise the question of size. I think it is about what is right. I agree that you need to have that sense of clustering. For us, the direct contacts, the relationships between the heads in our schools and the central team, working as a collegiate network, is hugely important. We have always been clear that we think there is a limit to size before which you need to break off. On the other hand, it would be a huge waste, it seems to me, to build up the expertise and the capacity in the trust and then not to use it. The question is more how you break it up, how you separate them out, and I think we are still working on that.



David Moran: I would concur. I would rather not focus on a specific number. I think that is where E-ACT went wrong beforehand. It is about the geography, the sense of that geography, the capacity to support each other and the evidence that people are delivering on the ground.

Q146 **Catherine McKinnell:** That was the question I was going to ask. To what extent does geography impact upon your decision-making more than size?

Lucy Heller: Hugely.

Q147 **Catherine McKinnell:** Significantly. Okay. As MATs are encouraged to grow—and that is reflected in the responses that you are giving; you have already said that you prefer measured growth—is your planning affected in any way by the indications that are coming in that size matters?

Barbara Daykin: We have considered that and looked at what we can do, and we have actually said no to schools where we feel it is not right, because we do not have the capacity or the right skill set to develop those schools. What is more important for us is what the philosophy is that sits behind your driver for expansion. We are very much about ambition for children. We want to support children in our local area, and we want to grow out in a careful way, supporting children in an area that is quite deprived. We cannot do that quickly, because we would not have the capacity to do it.

Q148 **Catherine McKinnell:** Do you feel you will always be able to resist those pressures? Do you feel that there are pressures coming to expand or to take on schools that you are concerned may not be sustainable in that way?

Barbara Daykin: It is an interesting question, because at the moment there are no schools being presented to us. This was a couple of years ago. At the moment, we have been seeking a school to join our trust, and that is proving quite tricky because some of the bigger MATs are offering a more glossy approach, whereas we are focused on school improvement.

Q149 **Catherine McKinnell:** Do you feel that there is a particular impact on small rural primary schools from MAT expansion?

Sir Steve Lancashire: One of the prerogatives for a trust of our size is to consider small rural schools that might be in danger of not finding a home. For example, when we have been working out in East Anglia—in Suffolk and so on—we have particularly targeted small schools or encouraged them to consider us, because we feel we are a safe home for a school that might not be viable on its own. One of the benefits of a larger MAT is that we can support smaller schools and make them economically and educationally viable.

Q150 **Chair:** On the subject of the size of MATs and clusters within MATs, do you prefer to see groups of schools of one type, like primary schools, or



do you prefer to see schools with primary schools, secondary schools and other structures?

Sir Steve Lancashire: You are asking a primary-only MAT here. When we established REAch2 it very much about primary education being our specialism and our passion, and we feel that we have a good history in school improvement. One of the questions that we constantly ask ourselves is what happens to our children at 11 when they go to secondary schools, and that is very mixed. Sometimes they go to great secondary schools and sometimes they do not. One of the reasons we established Reach4, for example, in South Yorkshire was the very notion of all-through education. To some extent, while REAch2 will always stay primary-focused, we work very hard at transition with secondary schools. Where we can secure all-through education, it is to the benefit of the pupils.

Lucy Heller: We have always been focused from the very beginning on that all-through model, clustering primaries and secondaries so that you can provide consistent experience all the way through.

Q151 **Chair:** Do you have any local clusters, or—

Lucy Heller: Yes. It is north London—

Chair: They are all of that model, are they?

Lucy Heller: Yes, or aspiring to be, because you sometimes get one piece of the jigsaw and not the other. We are trying to get that way.

David Moran: We have a mix, and I think that there is benefit from having both approaches. There are some clear pedagogical pieces that can be shared across the piece. There are some clear specialist facilities that can be shared from secondaries. I also think that there is an issue of sustainability and the financial capacity to be able to support a group.

Q152 **Chair:** Will this be a factor in future growth for you, Barbara?

Barbara Daykin: At the moment, it is unlikely. We have had conversations with our local secondary school, who did not feel that as a primary MAT we were able to meet their needs.

Q153 **Catherine McKinnell:** As you said, you do look to have geographical clusters. How do you deal with the concern that it is reducing choice for parents within a local area if all of the local schools are controlled by one MAT?

Lucy Heller: I suspect none of us want to be in that position. We are very clear that we do not want to be the sole provider, and I do not think there is any area where we are in danger of becoming that.

Sir Steve Lancashire: I think also what is happening is much more collaboration between MATs on which is the right kind of MAT for a school in that area. Previously, historically, MATs did not talk to each other about what was best for the schools in that particular area, whereas I



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know now that we do speak with other MATs about whether we are the right sponsor and whether there is enough choice in that particular area.

Chair: Okay. We are going to go on to school performance, with Lucy.

Q154 **Lucy Frazer:** Before we do, just on that last point, if you are operating in a city there is going to be choice, but if you are operating in primary schools in a rural area and you are the only MAT in that rural area, then there will be limited choice and you will be the sole provider. Is that an issue?

Sir Steve Lancashire: It could be, but we are aware of it. For example, where there are a limited number of sponsors in an area, we feel it is our duty to help other sponsors develop and grow. We do a lot of work for regional schools commissioners with emerging trusts and new trusts, helping them establish themselves so that there is this degree of choice. It could be an issue, but we are aware of it as a MAT ourselves and do as much as we can to try to support the growth of other trusts.

Q155 **Lucy Frazer:** I am not sure how that would work. If I take my own area, if you are the sole provider in three villages within a certain mile radius, you are going to be the sole provider. They are not going to go to a village three villages away. They want to usually go to their own village, so that will not overcome that problem even if you are helping someone in villages some miles hence.

Lucy Heller: Isn't it true by definition that if there is only the one school, then you cannot be anything but a monopoly provider? It is tough.

David Moran: Surely what parents want is for their school to be a great school, and that is first and foremost.

Barbara Daykin: Looking back a few years, there was only one provider, which would have been the local authority. In our MAT, one of our principles is to protect the identity of the individual school.

Q156 **Lucy Frazer:** Yes, that is an interesting point. You are providing more choice by the breaking up of the system from local authorities. What about the role of independent schools? Is there a role for independent schools in the MAT system or not? Does anyone have a view on that?

Lucy Heller: What sort of role are you imagining?

Lucy Frazer: I don't know. I am interested to know whether any of you work with independent schools or see that there is a role.

David Moran: With City Heights, a school in south London, we work closely with Dulwich College, which provides expertise in language tuition and access to sporting facilities. They provide students from their sixth form who do some work within the school. I will work with educational institutions who support our mission, vision and values and support our students, so I would actively support working with independent schools.

Q157 **Lucy Frazer:** What does Dulwich College get out of that arrangement?



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David Moran: Dulwich College get out of it opportunities for their students to work with other students from different backgrounds, to take sports leadership, to be able to develop their teaching and training skills.

Q158 **Lucy Frazer:** Is it part of their corporate responsibility rather than any financial or other incentive?

David Moran: Absolutely. No financial gain from it.

Lucy Frazer: Lucy, did you want to add to that?

Lucy Heller: No.

Q159 **Lucy Frazer:** Does anyone else have any thoughts?

Barbara Daykin: I will just say we will work with anybody if it brings benefits for children.

Q160 **Lucy Frazer:** I am going to get on to what I am meant to be talking about. David, you talked about how many of your schools have improved; they were in special measures and now 60% of them are good or better. I understand from the recent Ofsted report in December that nevertheless the quality of provision for too many pupils in E-ACT academies is not good enough. Do you think that any failings that still exist in the system are failings of the schools or of the MAT system?

David Moran: Myself, my trustees and my senior team are not complacent. We know that we still have a lot more to do, specifically with disadvantaged students and with some of our secondary academies as well. I believe it is about having a very clear strategy and a very clear plan, having the best people in place and having clusters that enable collaboration. I believe that the failings of the past were down to the multi-academy trust.

Q161 **Lucy Frazer:** Do you think you are in a position whereby you are not in too much of a challenge with the number of schools you have? Is the MAT system still putting pressure on your schools, which could be dissipated? Do you still have too many schools that are in special measures or too much of a diverse geography?

David Moran: I believe that we now have a regionalised structure. I have seven outstanding regional education directors who have that local accountability directly into the classroom. I believe that we have the right size, scope and shape of E-ACT now. Two years ago we did not, which is why we entered into the rebrokerage discussions with the Department for Education.

Q162 **Lucy Frazer:** Are you prevented from expanding in the short term, or could you now do whatever you wanted to do?

David Moran: The pause on expansion related directly to our financial notice to improve. We were the first multi-academy trust to have a financial notice to improve. One of the key things that we have not talked about today so far is that the priority has to be about clarity, our



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educational strategy and vision, but we have to be a viable organisation. We have to be able to direct resources and capacity to where it is required. Three years ago the organisation had 19 high risks from its external audit. It had a lack of financial control and financial management. We now have a system where we have good financial controls and good financial management. The financial notice to improve has been lifted, so theoretically we can grow.

Q163 Lucy Frazer: What I am trying to understand is the structure; if you are in a position where you are told to reduce the number of schools in your operation, how quickly can you get back to increasing them, or are you are limited from doing that for a significant period of time? How long was your limitation?

David Moran: The limitation lasted for the duration of the financial notice to improve.

Q164 Lucy Frazer: Which was how long?

David Moran: Which was approximately 20 months. However, the view from my leadership team and our trustees is that it has to be about the cluster. It has to be about the impact of that cluster on outcomes and about the capacity to be able to support another school.

Q165 Lucy Frazer: I understand that you would take management decisions, but the only limitation was for a 20-month period, and you could in theory now add 10 more schools to your system if you wanted to.

David Moran: Well, it would be down to the regional schools commissioners and the national schools commissioner to give that approval.

Q166 Lucy Frazer: You talked about rebrokering. From your perspective, when you were rebrokering out, was there anything that it surprised you that you were allowed to do or not allowed to do that would have made the rebrokering easier for the new school coming in? To give you examples, I am thinking about finances. For example, could you keep all the money that you had been given for the schools that you were rebrokering out, or were there any obligations in relation to working with a new trust or any discussions about who should be taking over? How do you think we could improve the rebrokering system, from your perspective?

David Moran: We rebrokered 10 academies, and we were the first multi-academy trust to engage in that rebrokerage process. The last academy was rebrokered nearly two years ago, and a significant number of lessons have been learned from the process that we engaged with. I think the process could be tighter in terms of the legalities and the requirement for the legal pieces to be more streamlined.

Q167 Lucy Frazer: Could you give me an example?

David Moran: My reflection from the process that we engaged in last time was that the lawyers ended up with a lot of public money through



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engaging in this process. My understanding is that since then the process has been streamlined and is less reliant on a legal provision.

Q168 **Lucy Frazer:** So the contracts were not clear enough.

David Moran: In terms of novation of contracts, looking at the huge amount of contracts each individual school engages with and enters into, moving those from one multi-academy trust to another multi-academy trust was quite complicated.

Q169 **Lucy Frazer:** How has it been streamlined? How easy is it?

David Moran: We have not been involved in that process, so I am unable to say, but I have been told that it is a lot simpler now.

Q170 **Lucy Frazer:** Is there anything that was still challenging by the time of your end transfers?

David Moran: I think the timing of rebrokerage is critical. The impact on the culture within the organisation during that rebrokerage period was difficult at the school level for individual teachers, principals and parents. There was the sense of not knowing what was happening and who they were going to, and there was the question of the sensible timing of when that information is shared and how that process happens. In my mind, it makes sense for any type of a rebrokerage to happen at the beginning or end of an academic and financial year.

Q171 **Lucy Frazer:** Done over the summer, then. I have a school that is being rebrokered, and there is a handover period. Is that helpful or not helpful, where they both work together for a short period of time?

David Moran: I think it is helpful for the incoming academy trust to have a real understanding of what they are taking on—the due diligence process. Whether it is a rebrokerage or just taking on a new academy, potentially one of the failings about growing too quickly and having a geographic spread was that due diligence was not taken seriously and schools were just taken on board. I don't know whether that was because there was Department pressure or because there was a desire to be big.

Q172 **Lucy Frazer:** Is there a standard process for due diligence? Is there a checklist that is produced by the Department as to what you should be looking for when you take over a school?

Barbara Daykin: No.

Q173 **Lucy Frazer:** Would that be helpful?

David Moran: I think it would be helpful.

Sir Steve Lancashire: Speaking from another point of view, where we have had schools brokered into the trust, we have found that due diligence is everything, because those trusts or those MATs have failed for a reason. Often it is about governance, financial acumen and so on. Our due diligence has had to be extremely thorough and has improved



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over the period of time. We have had one or two cases where it was not strong enough, and we have had some surprises that we were not wanting.

Q174 **Lucy Frazer:** Does the regional schools commissioner help you in that process? Should he or she help you?

Sir Steve Lancashire: I think your suggestion of what due diligence should look like is really key. We are a fairly mature MAT now and have developed our processes over a period of time. I think for a new MAT or a MAT trying to grow, it is very difficult to have that level of robust due diligence. I think there should be more help in the system.

Lucy Heller: I would have to say that I would be slightly worried about a MAT that did not have the capacity to know what was needed on due diligence. I think one of the problems on the rebrokering—and the evidence is that there will be more rebrokering to come—is that, for reasons that are entirely understandable, the Department prefers to view that just as a sort of SWIFT transfer. It is not treated as it needs to be, as effectively a reacademisation. Normally, when you are talking about sponsored academies, there is funding attached that recognises that those schools need some resource in order to turn them round. The difficulty with academies is that it is treated simply as a transfer and there is little or no funding available to support that. At the moment, it is more attractive for MATs to take on maintained schools rather than academies that have fallen into difficulties, and it seems illogical for that to be the case.

Q175 **Lucy Frazer:** So funding would be good for poorer schools—and the checklist?

Lucy Heller: I think where you are transferring a good school from one MAT to another there is no need for that, but in most cases the rebrokerage is not happening then. If it is a question of the school not having been turned round, and in some cases having gone backwards, it seems sensible to treat it on exactly the same basis as you would treat any maintained school.

Q176 **Lucy Frazer:** Lucy, you have said that rebrokerage is often reactive. How do you make it proactive? Are you suggesting that it should be and, if so, how?

Lucy Heller: No. I think it is being done proactively at the moment. One of the things that probably all of us are very clear on—one of the things that is critically going to determine the success of academies going forward—is the quality of the commissioning and accountability. We all believe that that can only be good, and that the Department, the RSCs and Ofsted should be very clear about assessing where MATs are not delivering and moving accordingly.

Lucy Frazer: Barbara wanted to say something.



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Barbara Daykin: I have been sitting on an interim board of a MAT that is being rebrokered at the moment. It has been separated, and two schools are going in different directions. One of them is going to E-ACT, actually, and that has been a really useful process. The transition that you mentioned is absolutely critical, because in order for E-ACT to do their due diligence, supported by the board, it needs quite a considerable amount of time for them to get into the school and find out exactly what needs to happen.

I think financial support is a problem, because in this particular instance—and this probably is not uncommon—there are some significant financial difficulties that could be sorted out with some additional funding, but there is no additional funding forthcoming. We are just having to manage, and hopefully the moral purpose will do its job and E-ACT will take the school.

As a trust, we have created our own template for due diligence—an audit document that will take us into any new sponsorship. That sort of preparation is one of the things that we have been doing over the last year or so.

Q177 **Lucy Frazer:** The Sutton Trust has said that some chains have had a number of consecutive years where they have remained at the bottom of attainment tables. What do we do about that where chains are not improving?

Sir Steve Lancashire: One of the things that we are really keen on is a self-improving system. There has not been enough learning from successful MATs. There has not been enough sharing of expertise, and I think it is incumbent on us as a profession to support each other. Where we see MATs struggling, I think there should be a collective response from the profession to support that MAT. Only this week David and I have been talking about how we might collaborate more and how we might learn from each other, and the more we can do that the more that will address the issue you are talking about.

Lucy Heller: At the same time, I suspect we would probably all agree that there is a clear responsibility for the Department and for the RSCs to address the consistent underperformance. We have to remember that many of the MATs have taken on, as we have, some of the most challenging schools in the country. It can take a long time to turn around. It is much tougher now than it was at the beginning, simply because of the change in funding. I would certainly want to say that you have to look carefully at each situation. It is very nuanced, but if there is consistent underperformance then there is a question about why that MAT should continue to be operating those schools.

David Moran: Fundamentally, that was a huge driver in the decision to rebroker some academies from E-ACT. It goes back to the point I made earlier on, which is that a parent just wants a great school. That is all they care about, and if you are not providing a great school, then that



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greatness needs to be created. A decision needs to be made on the trajectory of improvement and, as Lucy said, these things are not turned around overnight. They are certainly not sustainably turned around overnight. They take time to turn around.

- Q178 **Lucy Frazer:** One last question: is there a rush at the moment because there is a new system and everyone wants to get the best schools in their MAT, or a mixture of schools? Is there something happening at the moment that should be slowed down?

Lucy Heller: We have one school coming. We are keen to take on more, and we have capacity to take on more. We have one school joining the network in September, so there is no rush this end, and I am not particularly conscious of that.

- Q179 **Lucy Frazer:** If you want to take on more, why are you taking on only one?

Lucy Heller: Because we have not been offered other schools that fit our criteria.

- Q180 **Ian Mearns:** I cannot help but notice what I think is an ironic situation that we have. We are saying here that academies and academy trusts have to be given time to improve schools, but maintained schools don't get a chance to do that. If they fall below floor targets they have to convert to academisation. Is that not at all ironic from anybody's perspective?

Barbara Daykin: I would say so personally, from my experience.

Lucy Heller: No, because I think that on the whole we are looking at the maintained schools. The schools that fall below the floor in general have been failing children for some time. It is not that you have been working successfully and you have a blip and come down. I hope that with any sensible academisation, the question is always what is going to be the best for the children in that school. Nobody has the right to run a school, whether it is a local authority or a MAT. The only question is whether you can do it well, so I don't think any of us would want treatment that is not the same, essentially, as for maintained schools. We cannot speak to the ironies of—

- Q181 **Ian Mearns:** But therein lies the problem, Lucy. I have been a school governor since the mid-1980s and I remember the 1988 Act. I remember LMS, and I am still involved in a maintained school. I know for a fact that I, as chair of governors, and the headteacher make all of the decisions. We have assistance from the local authority, but we are not controlled by the local authority, and that is the big question: why is it that people keep referring to local authority-controlled schools? We have only had 20-odd years since the 1988 Act instigation of LMS.

Lucy Heller: There I would agree with you. Many local authority colleagues have said that they only wish they had the degree of control



that MATs potentially have. They have a much wider remit and they do not have direct controls over schools, so I take your point.

- Q182 Stephen Timms:** Lucy, you mentioned earlier the LSE research about what has happened to schools that have become academies. As I understand it, what they are saying is that schools that became academies before 2010, mainly failing schools, have done really well as a result of academisation. If you look at the schools that have become academies since 2010, outstanding schools that have become academies have done even better, but the bulk of schools—good, satisfactory and adequate schools—have not improved as a result of academisation. That sounds like a pretty severe critique of academisation as a tool of school improvement. What do you think is going wrong?

Lucy Heller: I agree, I think it is a huge challenge. They were clear when they spoke about it yesterday that what they do not know about is what has happened to these post-2010 sponsored academies. It may be a slightly different category and they have not broken it down, and that is the next thing they are going to look at.

I would argue that the problem with the converter academies was that what you were doing was taking existing capacity and converting it, expecting new capacity to somehow magically arrive. What happened was that the outstanding schools that had capacity to improve have done so, but there was not enough thought about how individual schools on their own were going to change themselves if they were only at good or satisfactory. I think there is a challenge for us. It is still pretty early days; it is very radical and has happened in a very short period. I think we probably need longer to see the overall impact, but I would agree that to date the converter academies have not been as definitively successful, at least, as one would have hoped.

- Q183 Stephen Timms:** The problem is, the Government have kind of bet the farm on academisation, and the evidence suggests it is not delivering, at any rate for most schools.

Lucy Heller: As I say, I think it is early to say. We are primarily concerned with the sponsored academies. Almost all of our academies are sponsored academies. The few converters that we have in most cases have effectively been treated as sponsored academies by the Department.

- Q184 Stephen Timms:** The Secretary of State told us that if a multi-academy trust does not have a strong record of school improvement it will not be allowed to take on more schools. What criteria do you think should be used to make that judgment?

David Moran: My view is that it is very clear. It has to be an impact on outcomes, with students attaining the levels expected—the progress the students are making. But also, fundamentally, it is about having the capacity to be able to share that good practice.



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Q185 Stephen Timms: Do you think there should be some published criteria so that we can see whether this particular MAT is over the threshold on this measure, or do you think a more balanced, qualitative judgment ought to be made?

David Moran: It needs to be very region-specific. As Barbara said, in one of my regions I have significant evidence of impact. I have fantastic capacity and the ability to support and lead other schools. In other areas of the multi-academy trust, we need to be absolutely focusing on the schools that we already have, ensuring that they maintain their trajectory. It needs to be slightly more nuanced and done at the cluster level, but in terms of the metrics I think the release of the information this week is a great first start on being able to understand some of those key numbers.

Q186 Stephen Timms: Do any of you have comments on specifically what the measurement should be based on?

Lucy Heller: General guidelines on what you would expect to see as evidence of the ability to improve schools would be valuable, but I think that the judgment needs to be nuanced in each case. It is not just about where the MAT has capacity but, equally, what the capacity is in that area. I am conscious that in London, for instance, there is a huge wealth of capacity of MATs who have the capacity, ability and desire to deliver school improvement. If you are looking particularly in rural areas and along the coast, there is much less of that, so I think in some cases the RSCs may simply be saying they have to work with what is there.

It seems to me that the overwhelming problem for the system is still the thing about system leadership. Just as there are not enough great heads to go around the system, there are certainly not enough great MAT leaders and executive heads. This is the problem for the system. That is universal, whether it is academies or maintained schools.

Sir Steve Lancashire: One of the dangers of just using certain measures, for example—such as Ofsted—is about whether it takes in the right reach. For instance, 70% of academies have not been inspected yet. Yet we have a lot of capacity to support schools. I think we have a much more balanced measure, so you could argue—

Q187 Stephen Timms: Is there data somewhere that you think could be used to make that judgment?

Sir Steve Lancashire: There is lots of data. Some of it is quantitative and some qualitative. For example, the relationship that we have with the regional schools commissioners is based on the knowledge they have about the capacity to assess the effectiveness of our trust. It should be balanced against that kind of data, which is certainly in the public domain.

Stephen Timms: Steve, can I press you on what is happening with your new Reach South trust? I am not quite sure what the difference is



between setting up a new trust, which I think is what you are doing with Reach South, as opposed to simply adding new schools—perhaps I can ask you to explain that.

As you have said, I think 16 of your schools have been inspected by Ofsted. Of those, seven so far require improvement. That is nearly half. I would be interested to know whether you have been required to demonstrate this strong record of school improvement that the Secretary of State referred to before they approved Reach South. Isn't there a danger that you will be one of these trusts that is expanding too fast?

Sir Steve Lancashire: Data soon becomes out of date, so we had a series of more inspections and now, of those schools that have been inspected for us, 80% are now good or better, so we have had changes in that.

Stephen Timms: How many schools are?

Sir Steve Lancashire: 80% now, so 17. 80% had reinspections of some of the RI schools this week and last week, so now overall 80% are good or better. Today we have a school being inspected that I think is going to go from special measures to outstanding. We constantly have to demonstrate that. One of the things that we were clear about—for example, in setting up a new trust—was looking at the ability of REAch2 to continue doing what it is doing, to impact on pupil outcomes, to improve schools. We were invited to apply for the northern fund to move REAch2 into South Yorkshire, and took a decision that that was not the right thing for REAch2. We needed to focus on the schools that we currently have and make sure that they continue to have impact.

We wanted, though, to do more, because that is our moral purpose, and we felt that establishing a new trust that has its own board of trustees, its own executives and its own school improvement is a better way of doing more for the system than just growing REAch2. It was a very considered decision that we want to do more, but let's do it in a way that is risk-averse and more guaranteed success.

Q188 **Stephen Timms:** Will you be chief executive of Reach South as well?

Sir Steve Lancashire: No, I won't.

Stephen Timms: There will be a separate chief executive.

Sir Steve Lancashire: I am only chief executive of REAch2. I was interim chief executive of Reach4 during that first year, while we established the trust, developed our improvement models and the schools were brokered into the trust. It is now run by its own chief executive, as will be Reach South.

Q189 **Lucy Frazer:** Moving on to regional schools commissioners and their role, you operate schools across different regions. There have been concerns about a lack of consistency in decision making across different regions. Sir David Carter is planning on taking direct control of the largest



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MATs of 30 or more schools. Could you say what your views are on this lack of consistency and whether Sir David Carter's proposals would assist? Lucy, would you like to start with that?

Lucy Heller: The answer is, yes, they will assist. I am delighted that David is going to be managing relationships with some of the larger MATs. I think that will be hugely helpful.

Q190 **Lucy Frazer:** Has the consistency issue been a problem for Ark specifically?

Lucy Heller: I don't think so much consistency as just the managing of the different relationships. We are always keen to have a single conversation where we can, so it will be hugely useful to have that with David.

Sir Steve Lancashire: I think we are a good example of where the DfE got it right from day one. Pretty much from inception, we had a relationship manager at the Department for Education who got to understand us, knew how we worked, tracked our progress and actually helped us build our board of trustees, and so could take considered decisions about what REAch2 should be doing, how we should be growing and so on.

We do operate with a number of regional schools commissioners, but we have always had a lead regional schools commissioner, Tim Coulson. He has very effectively managed us as an organisation. He really understands what we are good at and what our challenges are. Now I think the move to Sir David will only help improve that further.

David Moran: Like Steve, we have been very fortunate. We were given Sir David Carter, when he was regional schools commissioner for the south-west, to be the lead for E-ACT. I found, and I know the board of trustees and my wider leadership found, that the regular challenge and support at operational level—but also at strategic level, where Sir David has attended trustee meetings and principal meetings—has meant that we have had that one, single conversation. David's idea about taking the 10 biggest multi-academy trusts is exciting because hopefully not only will it mean more consistency, but it could mean enabling more collaboration between some of those multi-academy trusts as well.

Q191 **Lucy Frazer:** There was a recommendation in the recent Sutton Trust report that there should be more sharing of best practice. That sounds like a good idea. In reality, is that a practical proposal that could be implemented?

Lucy Heller: We do it a lot already. Like a lot of MATs, we spend a lot of time giving advice to fledgling MATs, talking to individual schools about where they are, providing training for people. We have a formal open day system where people can come in and see what we are doing. We are very happy to do that. We also get the benefit of doing that in return in



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places like Outwood Grange, where Michael Wilkins has been notable for opening up a lot of material. Yes, we would agree.

David Moran: I think we can do more and we can do it better. One of the things that Steve and I were talking about earlier on was doing peer reviews, where we are getting our principals and headteachers who have been trained in peer reviews to go into each other's schools. I think it is about the practical pieces. Alan Yellup, a headteacher I have worked with a lot—he is in another multi-academy trust—said that the successes he has found have been through going to other schools and looking at what is happening on the ground.

Q192 **Lucy Frazer:** There must be the temptation for the best academy chains to feel that they just want to get better rather than spend their time bringing others up to the same standard. Steve?

Sir Steve Lancashire: There is a lot of appetite among larger and more effective multi-academy trusts to help the system. Most of us believe in a self-improving system and are committed to that. I think where it could perhaps be improved is with RSCs, some of whom are very good at matching up established and experienced MATs with fledgling MATs and some of whom are less proactive in it. I think more consistency of the expectation on more effective trusts to engage in that kind of activity would help.

Q193 **Lucy Frazer:** Is the current regional schools commissioner structure an effective structure?

Sir Steve Lancashire: In this particular aspect or in—

Lucy Frazer: Yes.

Sir Steve Lancashire: Yes, I think it is. I think it is. I know that, like Lucy, we have a certain commitment to doing this kind of work with fledgling and new trusts, and I think it has been very effective.

Barbara Daykin: I would just add that there is a danger in small trusts that you can end up feeling quite disconnected if the focus is on the bigger MATs. I am pleased that David is going to be looking at the bigger MATs and freeing up the RSC to focus on the smaller MATs. I think more could be done to connect smaller MATs together and give smaller MATs a sense of having a voice in the system. There is a sense of being slightly isolated and slightly disconnected from the centre.

Lucy Frazer: Yes. I can see how having that cut-off might create a division. Thank you.

Q194 **Suella Fernandes:** It has been noted that it is sometimes challenging or unclear how parents or local communities can hold MATs to account and have an active involvement, because of the structure of MATs. This is a question to all of you. How do you involve parents in governance and accountability?



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Sir Steve Lancashire: We are really clear. We work in a number of different local communities all across the country, and we have to be responsive to those local communities. We are very clear that we are accountable to one of the main stakeholders in what we do. We take a conscious decision as a trust that governance for us is in three levels: at trust level, regional level and still at local governing body level. All our schools still have local governing bodies, and we still have elected parents. For us, that is a very important part of our governance. It means that we are held weekly or by term to account by those parents. It is a very clear, conscious decision for us to have parent governance.

Lucy Heller: Similarly, we have retained parent governors, but I also think our commitment to parents goes beyond that. The experience for many parents is the parent governor who they may or may not know. They may not feel that they have the route in there, so we want to make sure that we are addressing individual parents. Many of our schools do home visits so that as children join the school, the senior staff will go out to meet them in their homes to talk about expectations on both sides. The heads would expect to be getting direct feedback and are available to parents to talk to them, so it is key for us that we get that right.

That is generally shown, in a sense, by admissions. You know that you are doing right if people want to come. That is almost the best judgment, the judgment of feet—whether people are coming to the school or not.

David Moran: We absolutely believe in the importance of local voice, parental voice and parental engagement. There is unequivocal evidence that parental engagement leads to an improvement in standards. However, I also want to be clear, transparent and honest with all my stakeholders about our governance structures and accountability structures, which is why after a period of review we made the decision to engage parents in a different form of accountability.

We have academy ambassadorial groups on which we insist that there are at least two parents. We want many more, and in practice that is happening; way more parents are being involved in our academy ambassadorial groups. At the same time, I want the best experts holding my principals to account for performance. The legislation and best practice on safeguarding is deep and sometimes difficult to understand for lay people, and I employ experts, who sit at a regional level, to hold my schools to account on that. The parents and local community are invited every six weeks and have access to all the information and all of those discussions, but their focus is very much on community engagement, complaints and celebration. We believe that the focus is a much more open and transparent process.

We have some great emerging practice. I will take the example of Daventry where one of your colleagues, Chris Heaton-Harris, is working with the academy ambassadorial groups. He chairs those groups twice a year to listen to parents and the local community, and has a direct line



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through to the board of volunteers who work with E-ACT—they are our board of trustees. The focus there was to reduce duplication and to have one line of governance from the board of trustees down to not local accountability but accountability in the classroom.

Barbara Daykin: We have a very clear accountability framework and governance. Parent governance is fundamental to our governance framework for local governance. Local governance has a very clear remit, which is to focus on the quality of teaching and learning, pupil outcomes and safeguarding.

Chair: If you don't mind, we need some shorter answers, because we are running up to the wire.

Q195 **Suella Fernandes:** There is a view that parents want to be involved and engaged. Would you endorse that view, from your experience, or is it more nuanced than that? What appetite for engagement have you found among parents to take an active role in governing bodies, to be engaged with accountability and the running of the school?

Lucy Heller: It varies hugely. Where most parents want to be engaged is in having a sense that they have a voice in their children's schooling and that they know what is going on. At secondary school, particularly, that is more difficult and rarer, because parents do not feel the same kind of invitation into the school as they do in primaries. I am not sure that the governing body is the key mechanism for most parents. It is about having a day-to-day engagement and involvement with the school.

Sir Steve Lancashire: I think for us also, it is about where parent governors are engaged. It is about how much support and training and development we give them so they can be effective governors. There is a difference in being on a governing body and not contributing, and not challenging and supporting as you would want, so if we are going to have parent governors they need to be effectively supported and trained.

Q196 **Suella Fernandes:** It is not fair to say, then, that all parents everywhere want to be governors and want to be actively involved?

Lucy Heller: No. We have quite a hard time. In some cases it is hard to get parents to stand for—

Barbara Daykin: There are different avenues for parents to get involved and governance is just one of them, but lots of parents are very keen to be involved.

Q197 **Suella Fernandes:** What do you think works in getting parents more actively engaged, particularly in the context of MATs?

Lucy Heller: We were talking about the school home visits, and the day-to-day connection. It is about their knowledge of what is happening in the school, their invitation to parents' evenings and parent councils, and things that bring them into social events. I think it is day to day rather more than it is governance structures.



David Moran: I concur with Lucy fully there. I would add that family learning is a critical piece. All too often, especially in secondary schools, parents feel that there is a rift between what their children are being taught and what their understanding is and how they were taught. What we have found is that we can engage families to do learning together—I know that the Khan Academy video clips have been very successfully deployed and utilised in a raft of our academies to get that engagement.

Q198 **Suella Fernandes:** Would you say that it is right that there is a direct correlation or connection between active parent engagement and the progress of a child, or even progress in a school?

David Moran: Absolutely.

Chair: Thank you, Suella. Thank you all very much indeed. We will continue this investigation, but your answers have been very helpful today, so thank you.

Examination of Witnesses

Councillor Richard Watts, Emma Knights, Chris Keates and Russell Hobby.

Q199 **Chair:** Welcome to part two of today's investigation. Thank you very much indeed for coming along. We have 40 minutes to get through six questions, so we want pithy answers, and if you think somebody has already said what you would say, just say, "It has been said". I think that is the best way of conducting a panel at the speed we need to conduct it.

You heard what I was saying before, I think, because you were all in the room when I opened up the session. I will say again that the purpose of this inquiry is to find out what a good multi-academy trust looks like. What do we need to say to encourage MATs to be better?

First I will quickly invite you to say who you are and what you represent.

Councillor Watts: Thank you. I am Richard Watts. I am the leader of Islington Council and Vice-Chair of the LGA Children and Young People Board.

Chris Keates: I am Chris Keates. I am General Secretary of the NASUWT, the teachers union, representing a significant number of teachers and school leaders in academies and in fact in all schools.

Russell Hobby: Russell Hobby. I am General Secretary of the NAHT, the school leaders union.

Emma Knights: I am Emma Knights, Chief Executive of the National Governors Association.

Q200 **Chair:** The key question I think is bubbling around is this. Does it really matter if we have MATs or local authorities if there is not a huge amount of evidence to prove that one or the other does not improve education?



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That is certainly the conclusion of the Education Policy Institute. In short, what do we need to do to improve standards, and is the creation of MATs going to be useful enough?

Councillor Watts: First, I concur with your conclusion that there is not a great deal of evidence that suggests a school's governance status makes a great deal of difference to its performance one way or the other. I have been looking at the detail of the Education Policy Institute's report. It showed that academy conversion had worked for some very poorly performing schools and had also allowed some very well performing schools to really fly, but for the vast bulk of schools in the middle it had made no difference or, if anything, had been slightly unhelpful to them.

If we are after a system that works, not just for individual schools but across a system that delivers effective place planning, delivers for vulnerable pupils, delivers for SEN children and delivers a whole range of the other critical things that we need a system to perform, then we need a middle tier, whether that is MATs or local authorities. Our view is—taking the words of Lord Nash at a conference the other day—that MATs work best in tight local geographies of schools where schools can work together to share best practice. I think the LGA would argue you already have those, and they are called local authorities, and there is no massive need to reinvent the wheel on that.

Q201 **Chair:** That is certainly a local authority view and thank you for that. Russell, what do you think?

Russell Hobby: If every school in the country became an academy tomorrow, you would have no difference in the standards of our education system or in the gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged, so we need to be very careful about where we push people to. However, the process of forcing otherwise good and outstanding schools to convert to academy status against their will could distract those schools from the job that they are already doing, so you could see worse outcomes in some areas.

I think we have become distracted by the labels of “academy” and “chain”, without questioning what goes on inside them. Clearly, there are some outstanding academy chains, and we have not asked enough what makes those different from the rest of them. Until we do that, we are getting fixated on the legal status of schools rather than the reality, which is: what are they doing about teaching and learning?

Chair: This Committee is doing exactly that, Russell, because that is why we are having this inquiry.

Russell Hobby: Excellent.

Chair: That is what I want to tease out, and by the end of this whole process I want to see the very points that you have made glaring in the headlights.



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Russell Hobby: We have views on that, which we can come to if you want.

Chair: I do, but first of all I want to hear from Chris.

Chris Keates: From our point of view, we think the time has come—and we hope this Select Committee is doing this—to transcend a focus on structural change. For us, we are past the point where it should matter what it says on the tin of a school. Whether it is an academy, community school or foundation free school, it is actually about what that school is delivering in the context of a national public education system that should be delivering entitlement for all children and young people. For us, it is about the values those schools are operating and learning from the best, whether they are within a MAT, a maintained school or a church school—whatever it is that is delivering that entitlement.

Q202 **Chair:** Thank you. Good answer. Russell, you said there are some outstanding MATs, so would you be willing to point us in the direction of where they might be and why they are outstanding in a letter?

Russell Hobby: Yes.

Chair: Thank you. I am now going to ask Ian to develop the line of the role of local authorities.

Q203 **Ian Mearns:** I am particularly interested in the fact that the Government have the massive expansion of the role of academies and multi-academy trusts as their aim. How will local authorities manage places and admissions without the ability to influence individual multi-academy trusts' own planned admission numbers?

Chris Keates: Clearly there has to be place planning. That is critically important—there has to be proper strategic place planning for a locality, and it has to be fair and transparent. Local authorities, of course, have done that place planning before.

There are different structures emerging. At the moment there are sub-regional structures. There are all sorts of structures emerging, but the issue is, who is going to take responsibility for that place planning? We don't think that rests with MATs. We think MATs have a role in admissions because, clearly, they should be operating in accordance with the fair admissions code.

The problem at the moment is the lack of a clear intermediate tier that is holding schools to account. For example, they are operating a fair admissions code, and we get all sorts of anecdotal evidence of where people are selecting by stealth—or they are accused of selecting by stealth—or we are seeing different intakes, and we are seeking local communities disenfranchised. There is no hard evidence of that, because it is very difficult to get it, but that is the perception that is out there. There is the absence of a code of compliance with the fair admissions code, and the hard evidence that we used to get from local authority



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annual reports on admissions across an area no longer exists. That means it is important that we get that strategic planning and clear responsibility back.

Q204 Ian Mearns: A colleague of mine referred to parents' evenings prior to admission as "trial by sherry". You can take that whichever way you want. Richard, what indications do you have that local authorities are planning to set up their own multi-academy trusts? In a previous hearing I put it to the Secretary of State that we had been told, quite categorically, that if a local authority's fingerprints were all over an application to become a multi-academy trust, it would somehow be disallowed.

Councillor Watts: That is the impression many councils have in exploring this. To be absolutely honest with you, local councils will play the rules of the game. If the rules of the game are that you have to try to set up MATs or be involved in setting up MATs, then that is what many councils will do. The LGA's view is that it would be better if we could avoid going through that quite expensive and bureaucratic process.

Going back to the previous question, the real challenge for local authorities is that we don't have a lot of powers in the school system. We have influence in most of the issues about place planning or the admission of difficult kids. The other structural challenges in the school system will get sorted out by sensible adults having a sensible conversation. That is how it will work the vast majority of the time. The challenge is where that does not work and local authorities then lack the powers when push comes to shove. That is a challenge, so having your own MAT would be a useful tool in all of that, because you can direct it to expand if need be. However, as I say, broadly our view is that if we could go without having the expensive bureaucracy associated with that, it would be better.

Q205 Ian Mearns: Does anyone have any concerns about what the impact of the growth of multi-academy trusts could be, for instance, on specialised provision for children?

Chris Keates: There is a real concern, if there is going to be a massive and rapid expansion of multi-academy trusts, about whether some schools and some children are going to fall through the cracks. If you have performance league tables for MATs, for example—we heard from the previous witnesses about how carefully they are selecting the schools they are getting involved in—we could find there are some schools that no particular MAT wants. We are also already hearing from local authorities, and our own sources in schools, concerns about admissions of children with special educational needs and vulnerable children. I think there is a danger that unless the whole system has that strategic overview, there are going to be children who fall through the cracks.

Russell Hobby: That would seem to be a very sensible role for the local authority to fulfil as a champion of the most vulnerable children in their



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area, but as previous speakers have said, you have to give them the powers to match their responsibilities. That means powers across maintained and academy schools so that if they need to direct an academy to increase its places or to accept children with SEN needs, they can do so.

There are different functions that are best performed at different levels of the system and at different scales. Improvement of teaching and learning is best done in small groups, I think, but there are other things, such as place planning, that need a whole community and area view. There are also other responsibilities where you are just creating an unacceptable conflict of interest if you devolve them to the school level, and I think admissions is one of them. It is not fair to ask schools to do this because you are putting them in a position where they have to make very difficult choices that should be done by someone independent of them.

Emma Knights: I certainly agree with Russell, so that is speedy for you.

I wanted to add that there is a real concern, though, about the haemorrhaging of expertise at the moment. Those employed by local authorities can see the writing on the wall and are making moves in some cases to go elsewhere. We need to think about this incredibly carefully, because we spent decades trying to help various parts of children's services work together through inter-agency working, and we are in danger of that falling apart even more than ever. That will not help vulnerable children in schools, nor does it help schools when they find that their SENCO is the person who is now trying to co-ordinate a whole range of agencies because there isn't the capacity left in other places.

Q206 **Ian Mearns:** It is more than writing on the wall when you know that the education support grant for the local authorities is going to be cut by more than 80%.

Emma Knights: Yes.

Russell Hobby: And for academies as well. That middle tier of funding is being taken out of the system as well. Although the schools budget looks like it is being held flat, many of the services that would have been provided by other agencies, whether academy or maintained, are going away and the schools are having to do that for themselves, which I think has a huge impact.

Chair: We are going to move on to governance, starting off with Stephen.

Q207 **Stephen Timms:** I will press you a little bit further about whether you think there is a problem with the accountability of multi-academy trusts. You heard a few minutes ago the chief executive of E-ACT explaining why they have decided to scrap their local governing boards and centralise decision making in the trust instead. Were you persuaded by that explanation, or do you think there is a problem about accountability in that particular case, and perhaps in other MATs as well?



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Emma Knights: Can I start with that, because obviously this is our bread and butter? It is absolutely clear, it is not debatable, that the accountable body for a multi-academy trusts is the board of trustees. We don't think that that has had enough discussion. We think it is a huge change in governance of our publicly funded schools. It is happening under the radar, and we are forever saying to the Department for Education, "You have to talk about this more. You have to write more about this", because there is a huge amount of confusion out there about this sort of thing. We are doing our best, but if the Department is not being explicit about this, which they are not—I will give you an example. In the White Paper the word "trustee" does not exist. There is one reference to "trusteeship", but not "trustee". That is a huge omission. They are still talking old-style governance. They are often still using the word "governors", and by and large that is a defunct word for multi-academy trusts. It does not help, because what it means is—

Stephen Timms: Sorry, is a what word?

Emma Knights: A defunct word. In the legal framework you have your trustees, so they are in charge of the trust. Then that board of trustees decides whether or not it is going to have committees. The trouble is that so many different trusts have different articles, so you cannot say, "This is the model for articles, and this is how it will work". Quite understandably, different trusts have different models. Some of them will use the word "governors" in their articles, particularly if they were set up early. It was a mistake, and it was a problem, and in the later models the Department has stopped using the word "governor" because it has caused so much confusion. Why? As Ian explained, it is because governors in maintained schools have very explicit legal responsibilities. That does not transfer into a multi-academy trust, whereas a lot of maintained schools that have transferred into a multi-academy trust think that perhaps it does. That can be because they have not read the small print; because their lawyer did not really understand, despite getting quite a large fee; or possibly because possibly the multi-academy trust has enticed them in by saying that nothing will change when that is legally incorrect. As you can gather, I can keep on going on this, but I will stop there.

Q208 **Stephen Timms:** Presumably you think this is a problem, or do you not?

Emma Knights: It is not necessarily a problem if you do it well, if you know the risks and if you look at the charity sector. For some reason, the Department for Education simply does not want to look at practice in the charity sector. Instead, what it is doing is looking at historic school practice and building it in in a way that is not terribly helpful.

I can talk a lot about local governance at academy level as well. For example, I could not leave without mentioning the schemes of delegation. Every single multi-academy trust should have published a scheme of delegation, which will cover things such as David was talking about: how do they govern at academy level? In the end, it was a big



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piece of work for us. We published a full model of them—SODs, we call them—in April, because there was so much confusion out there. We are not saying they are perfect, or saying “You should adopt them as they stand”. There are others, and we want to improve them over the summer, but why did we have to do it? There was so much confusion out there, and the vast majority of MATs were not complying with that requirement.

Q209 Chair: Could you let us have some of that work you have just done, so we can consider it as part of the evidence?

Emma Knights: I can share that with you.

Q210 Stephen Timms: Can I ask the other three whether you think there is a problem about the accountability of national and perhaps regional MATs to local communities, or whether you are reasonably relaxed about it?

Chris Keates: I think there is a serious problem. We often describe what goes on in MATs as a “secret garden”, and I think one of the most important issues this Committee has to consider is the whole issue of governance and accountability. I don’t think there is any other public service, or even one in the charitable sector, for example, that has a governance structure that is so down to individual decision. If you look at maintained schools, their governance is in statute and it is quite clear what has to happen. If you look at MATs, their governance is done in the articles of association or their funding agreements. Quite often it is not clear, even to people who are working in those structures or parents who are engaged in those structures. You can have a situation where you have an overarching trust. You might even have a middle regional tier. You may then have school governing bodies, but where are the decisions actually being made? You may have a situation where there are no individual governing bodies in schools. There is an overarching trust, and then all sorts of other arrangements may or may not be made for engagement of stakeholders in that issue.

How are the decisions made about who is on the trust overarching board, which tends to be the seat of power in the MATs? How do people get on to those? Are they hand-picked? Certainly in many cases they are not elected. What overall responsibilities do they have? You could have a governing body in a group of primary or secondary schools, for example, that is there in name but actually is not making any of the key decisions. They may become cheerleaders for the local community, but the decisions are being made far away in a trust board that they never engage with. So I think clear criteria and a clear framework, if MATs are going to expand, are what a good governance and accountability structure should look like.

We think accountability is far too lax. We absolutely support Ofsted inspecting the MATs because, quite frankly, the individual schools have been inspected but often they could be inspected on things that were



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outside their control because the decision has been made by a trust board.

Chair: We have already covered the ground about MATs being inspected, and there was widespread agreement that they should be.

Councillor Watts: Very briefly, I think the point about inspection is important. It is also worth saying that a lot of the financial issues, where they have been flagged up in MATs, have come from whistleblowers rather than being found through the proper structures. With the EFA operating at the scale they do, it is not surprising.

The point I want to make about accountability is that the nub of it is trying to find problems in a school's performance before you see them in the data. As soon as you see them in the data, it is because they have happened in kids' exam results and their life chances have been affected. The more remote forms of governance, whether they are regional schools commissioners or a remote trustee board, are largely data-driven and are playing catch-up, because the problem has existed long enough. I think parents are really useful canaries in the mine who spot problems before they get reflected in the data, which is the nub of a successful governance system.

Russell Hobby: Can I offer a counterpoint on the inspection of chains? There is a risk in there too, if you are averaging out the results of the individual schools across the chain. I think a parent cares about the performance of the school that a child is at rather than the performance of the MAT as a whole. As a system, we are interested in what value the MAT is offering to its schools. I think we should inspect them, but I don't think we should be seeing one inspection report for a group of 12 schools. It would be an important requirement to say, "What is the quality of teaching and learning and behaviour in this individual school?" as well. What you are looking at is a sort of tiered system. Maybe you share the judgment for leadership and management across the chain, but you have individual teaching and learning judgments going on inside the school.

Q211 **Chair:** Surely an inspection of a MAT would cover the issues of how governance or trustee structures were operating.

Emma Knights: One would hope it should, but there is not the expertise in the system yet to do that properly, which goes back to my point that the education system has not boned up enough on governance and there really is a lack of knowledge there. I am a bit worried that you might be leaving governance, and I haven't made my point about—

Chair: We are not leaving governance just yet.

Emma Knights: We aren't? Good.

Chair: What we are trying to do is get short answers to pithy questions.

Ian Mearns: Or pithy answers to short questions.



Q212 **Catherine McKinnell:** What would you see as the future for parental involvement in MAT governance, Russell?

Russell Hobby: Just to get something in on that, I think we have muddled up the two essential aspects of representation and non-executive decision making. We tried to make one body do them both, and it doesn't necessarily do them very well. I would be keen that we distinguish between the need for parents to have a voice and be represented, and the sort of non-executive board functions that are more skills-driven. You could easily think of separate ways of achieving those with parental councils, with mandatory powers, for example, which could include the recall of the trust board or something like that. Then you could have smaller, more skills-focused bodies that hold the leadership teams of the schools to account.

Emma Knights: I agree that we do muddle up parental engagement with governance. We are thoroughly supportive of best parental engagement. NGA has just put out some guidance about that. I completely agree with Russell about parents' involvement in governance; you have to make sure you have the right skills on the board. The best boards are diverse boards in terms of knowledge and experience. We sometimes tend to forget that and just think about skills. We cannot have everybody coming on to the board from one place. It does not make for good decision making.

The reason we are incredibly supportive of retaining two reserved places—and that is what we are talking about here—for elected parent governors is the point that Chris just made about ownership and legitimacy. Who is this trust board as MATs grow? Hopefully we might come back to that point about size, because it is incredibly important to this subject as well.

Chair: We will, yes.

Emma Knights: Great. What you are doing is increasing the risk by having this small group of people in charge of more and more and more of people's education. It is particularly worrying if these people are self-appointing. We think that you absolutely have to have a separate route on to the governing board. That is why we are saying that parents bring a very important dimension of knowledge, but they are also another voice that will make for stronger and better decision making at board level.

Chair: I think Chris wants to intervene.

Chris Keates: I do, because I feel quite strongly about this. I feel very strongly about parental engagement, and I don't see parental engagement not embracing governance. I think parents' engagement can be about an engagement in feeling that they have some ownership of what is taking place in the school by representation on a governing body, as well as engagement in a whole variety of other ways.



If you look at the White Paper, which is obviously the direction of travel in which the Government are going with parents, there is a bit of a schizophrenic approach. On the one hand we have had the Education and Adoption Act, which has taken away a parent's right to be consulted about a change in the status of the school. We also have in the White Paper the fact that having parents on governing bodies is optional, but then we have it being said that parents can trigger a change of sponsor or move a school to another MAT. How that would work in practice I have absolutely no clue.

First of all, the sponsor may not want you. Secondly, the MAT you are trying to move from may be the only MAT in a region. Some of that seems a little bit superficial in looking at what is genuine parental engagement. It was quite illustrative from the previous witness session that a lot of it struck me as being very cosmetic, about how parents were involved and what work was being done to say, when those parents got engaged in the various groups, how that was influencing what the trust board decisions might be made. Or was it just a structure that—

Chair: Yes, those are the problems that we are trying to tackle understand and resolve.

Q213 **Catherine McKinnell:** You have mentioned the number of reserved places and you have mentioned safeguarding, but as the size of a MAT becomes quite significant, that clearly dilutes the voice that the schools may feel they have within the governing body, and it increases the distance between the elected parental representatives and the schools themselves. I would like your thoughts on that, but also, do you think parent councils will be able to hold MATs to account in the same way as the parents on the governing bodies currently do?

Emma Knights: There are so many questions in that. You cannot make assumptions that just because a trust is of a certain size it does or doesn't value parental engagement. People are developing different systems.

Q214 **Catherine McKinnell:** I didn't say about valuing it. I just mentioned the distance between the schools and the parents within that school.

Emma Knights: They can do it well. I don't think we should assume that because you get bigger and the distance increases, in terms of the numbers of schools in the trust, that means that it will necessarily be poor. There might be a danger of that. There are some things that are best done at school level—for example, you can have structures whereby you have representatives who meet with the chair of the board of trustees, or in fact you can do it up the executive arm. We haven't talked at all about executive accountability, which is very strong in MATs. That is why the governance accountability is fundamentally changed, because you do not want to duplicate. That is what some of the early MATs did. They had headteachers of schools in the difficult situation of being



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answerable to what they were calling a local governing body, at the same time as being answerable to their executive head. That was untenable.

You have to be smart about how you think about that and do it. However, you could also be quite exciting and innovative with the trust structure if we were brave enough. I think the school sector is really lacking in imagination here. The way a trust works is that right at the very top you have members. Although I said that the trust board is the accountable board, you have to add that the members can get rid of them if they are rubbish.

We don't talk very much about members, but actually they are the supremo bosses. Who are they? Again, it depends on when you became a trust, because the DfE kept changing its ideas. Its first model was appalling. They tended to have three members, of whom one was a CEO, which is a dreadful model. You probably have five members now. I think we should look to the charity sector in the sort of things we do. For example, at NGA I have thousands and thousands of members who can turn up at our AGM and sack my trustees and tell me what to do. We could do something much more akin to that with schools, where our members could be our parents or we could have members who were perhaps elected from different schools, because schools have no say in the system either.

Q215 Chair: Can I develop that point quickly? I have been thinking along similar lines? I think it would be a good idea, for example, to construct a system where parents collectively could challenge the trust. That is essentially what you are saying.

Emma Knights: Yes.

Russell Hobby: That has some resonance with the co-operative movement principles as well, for those that have implemented it. It is a model for that.

Speed of growth is as much a problem as the absolute size of a trust. As you will have seen in the evidence, it is the unplanned, unmanaged growth that separates the centre from the individual schools. That is a huge challenge to the agenda that we have, because MAT executive heads and CEOs are telling me that they are getting phoned every day asking to take on more schools—schools that they have never met and have no idea whether they fit in. So you have this tension with the lack of capacity, because we need more and more trusts and we need the existing trusts to grow as swiftly as possible, yet rapid growth without a good plan is the biggest threat to the success of raising standards, and I don't think we have tackled that problem at all.

Chris Keates: Can I come back on the issue of the parents? Looking at it from the point of view of an individual parent, I think we are getting to a stage where parents are confused about who is running their child's school. I know from colleagues who are still in local government that



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when they were in a local authority school, the council was somehow responsible and they would go to their councillors. They still go to their councillors now about academies and the schools that are in.

We are seeing this from the point of view of teachers as well. The system is becoming so complex. Quite often now you don't know who the employer is. It can take some time to find out in one of these multi-academy trusts who actually is the employer. Is it still the individual school within a trust? Is it an overarching trust? That can become extremely complex in terms of responsibility.

I go back to what I said before, that all of this has to be unpicked to open the secret garden to make sure that everybody knows, particularly in the public interest, who is running the schools. On what basis are they there? How are they held accountable? That is critically important in a public service.

Q216 Catherine McKinnell: Would you suggest, therefore, that there is one model of governance that applies across the board?

Chris Keates: I think there has to be a governance framework, because we are where we are with the different kinds of structures that have been set up. I think there has to be a clear governance framework as your bottom-line framework.

Emma Knights: We have charity law and company law, and there are thousands and thousands of charities that operate successfully using that. That is why the scheme of delegation is so important, Chris, because that is what that does. A scheme of delegation has to be published, and that explains who makes what decisions.

Can I pick up on the size point now or do you want to come back to that later?

Chair: A tiny point.

Emma Knights: A tiny thing. I completely agree with what Russell says about growth, but I don't think we should be blasé about size. Actually, the jury is out. We don't yet have enough evidence about size. When we published last year—

Chair: You are straying into Michelle's area.

Emma Knights: Am I? Shall I stop?

Chair: Yes.

Emma Knights: Okay. If I can, I will come back to that.

Q217 Michelle Donelan: On that topic, Sir David Carter forecast that there would be thousands more MATs by 2020, which is a significant increase. Going back to what you were saying a minute ago, Russell—that the process needs to be looked at—how do you think we can properly control



that and make sure that it is a managed process to get to that point, if that is where we are going to get to?

Russell Hobby: There are two problems of growth. One is in the number of MATs and the other is in the size of individual MATs, and we need to be able to manage both of those. If we want 1,000 new institutions, some are going to fail and some are going to succeed, and our oversight of that process, as other witnesses have said, is very tenuous. It is about whether eight regional schools commissioners, even with deputies, can give that detailed local oversight that doesn't wait for the data—I absolutely agree, once you have the data it is too late. You need to know before that happens. It could be five years in advance of the data telling you what is wrong.

We don't have the level of oversight required to manage the number of new trusts coming in. I think David has some really good and sensible ideas about entry points and when you check whether a trust is growing properly, but I still think the scale of oversight is too great. Then you have the size of the trusts themselves inside that. I think we will see that the ideal trust size is about half a dozen to a dozen schools when we are talking about school improvement. It will vary, obviously. That is not a hard rule, but I think the smaller, tighter groups are the ones that can really focus on teaching and learning.

That is not big enough for issues such as procurement and shared services, so what I would like to see is multiple overlapping networks of schools. It doesn't all have to be done within the same group of half a dozen schools. You could have trusts working together to do procurement. You could have teaching school alliances and other networks spanning those. The danger is when each network builds on top of each other and we have a very bulky system. Then we have the same problem of fragmentation and lack of knowledge sharing but between trusts rather than between schools.

Michelle Donelan: So much more of a collaborative approach.

Councillor Watts: That rapid expansion of MATs would be very challenging. It has been said by other speakers that the biggest risk to a MAT's performance is rapid and unmanaged growth. We are seeing genuine issues for regional schools commissioners of simply not finding enough partners to broker with. We are seeing inadequate schools waiting two years to find sponsors in some instances, and the LGA could write to the Committee with some details of that.

Chair: That would be helpful.

Councillor Watts: The question is: where are we going to find people willing to step forward to undertake those MATs? I suspect those numbers are only envisaged in a fully academised world, which I think the Government have suggested they wish to move away from at the moment. It could be that we don't need those numbers now. However, what we are going to see then is a continued enormous level of variance



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in the performance of those MATs. There will need to be some kind of accountability mechanism for that, to make sure that we are not seeing children fall between gaps, as it takes a number of years for the data to come through. At the moment, RSCs don't have the capacity to do that in anything like the number of MATs that are being envisaged by Sir David.

Chris Keates: I am not convinced the Government have moved away from full academisation. I think they have moved away from the timetable. I am not sure they have moved away from that, but I think the issue is that—I think David Carter is right, essentially—by 2020 you could have 1,000 MATs, but it is important to focus on the basics. We still do not know in a clear sense how the current 500 are actually operating before we get to an expansion. One of the things that is missing in the system all the time is the clear criteria of how decisions are being made for a MAT to expand, how decisions are being made—

Q218 **Chair:** Yes, but what we are trying to work out is what those criteria should be, and if you have any ideas send us a line.

Chris Keates: I will write in with some ideas on that. David Carter at the moment is coming up with his so-called health check for the MATs before they can expand. The problem with that is that the health check is going to be done on the basis of peer review, so a MAT is going to be reviewing another MAT.

Chair: Yes. Well, we want to hear not necessarily your criticism of that, but what you think we should be recommending in our report.

Chris Keates: I am happy to write in about it.

Chair: That is what we want to know, and that applies to all of you, essentially.

Emma Knights: I was going to say that most of the evidence showing that getting into a group of schools improves outcomes for pupils comes from LA-maintained federations. As we said earlier in the session, we sometimes muddle up the legal change to becoming an academy with the much more important thing, we think, of coming together as a formal group of schools. There are two types of those and one is LA maintained federations, which have been around for longer than multi-academy trusts. Sometimes MATs don't like looking at the good practice of federations, because they think it is a big yesterday, but it isn't. We are still getting federations forming now. We are also getting some federations moving in and converting as MATs.

What we learn from federations isn't rocket science. It is quite obvious when you think about it that being together so that staff can move between schools in short distances is important, so that you can have staff sharing. I think the important thing is that on the numbers, we keep talking about MATs that are 20-plus schools, and we shouldn't be. If you divvy up the number of school pupils via 2,000 MATs, we are talking a little amount.



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Chair: Thank you, Emma. That is a good point.

Q219 **Michelle Donelan:** What do you personally think is the maximum number of schools that should be in a MAT? One figure each.

Russell Hobby: It will vary, but just for the exercise I would say a dozen.

Councillor Watts: I would struggle to put a figure on it; I think it varies.

Emma Knights: I think we should not talk about schools. I think that is historical. Some schools have 30 pupils; some have thousands of pupils. I think we should talk about pupils. If you just simply divvy up the number of pupils by about 1,500 MATs, you get a figure of about 5,000 pupils. That is probably in the right sort of area.

Chair: Thank you very much for that attempt at the figures. Suella has one question, but it is a critical question. If you don't think you can answer it quickly send us a letter.

Q220 **Suella Fernandes:** It may not be possible to answer it quickly, Chair. Turning to the highest-performing trusts, what are the characteristics that they possess, and what role should they play in sharing best practice?

Emma Knights: People. It is all about good people developing people. They kept using the word "capacity" in the earlier session. What capacity tends to mean is having good people, so whether that is trustees, CEOs, headteachers, teachers, it is all about how you develop your staff. There are some advantages of being in a group that help you do that better—you can talent-spot, move people around, retain staff.

Russell Hobby: There are three characteristics of high-performing groups of schools, regardless of whether they are academy trusts. The first is that they manage their growth carefully and know what they are good at. There is a type of school that they add value to, and there are schools that they don't, and they grow step by step. The second one is that they share people and resources between the schools, which builds on Emma's point. A talented maths teacher can spread that talent across the whole group of schools. The third and most vital one is that they have a vision for school improvement that they share across the schools. They know what a good school is and they know how to get there, and that is what they are about. I tell my headteachers, "If you are evaluating a multi-academy trust and all you hear about is the number of schools, how fast they are going to grow and how important the CEO is, walk away from that group of schools. What you need to hear is what they do for children and why the children in your school will be better off being part of this trust".

Chris Keates: Great teachers; great leadership; collaboration; investment; good governance; schools operating with the right values



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and operating in the interests of providing entitlement for all children and young people.

Chair: Richard, you are going to find it difficult to come up with anything new.

Councillor Watts: I am, but I will be brief. Good schools are made up of great leaders and great teachers. Governance status really is not a factor in it, so the challenge is what you can do with the quality of your people and your vision for teaching and learning. I think that is the critical thing, and a lot co-operation, with a high-performing school supporting lower-performing schools, is critical.

Q221 **Chair:** Right. Thank you all very much indeed. I am sorry that went in sort of a pacey way but it was necessary to meet our time commitments. You have all answered our questions interestingly. Russell, you are going to write to us.

Russell Hobby: On the trusts.

Chair: Yes. That would be really helpful. If you have any other thoughts that you think we should be aware of, do give them to us, because we know what the issues are. What we are really looking for is what kind of recommendations we can make to improve things.