

8 School-to-school support: Academies working together

Collaborative support is a defining feature of the academies programme. As academies have been freed from local authority control they are better able to support one another: sharing expertise, providing challenge and improving standards across the education sector. Evidence suggests that both secondary and primary academies are building formal partnerships across the sector through sharing leadership, multi-academy trust arrangements and sponsorship. Schools are showing increasing creativity in their offer of support. Examples include: joint practice development, developing middle leadership, running CPD courses and boosting senior leadership capacity. There is an expectation on all academies to work in partnership with other schools following conversion and DfE research ¹¹ shows that they are doing so.

Academies are building formal partnerships with other academies

Strong chains of two or more academies can help drive up standards and provide opportunities for increased support across schools. Secure and good schools can help other schools in the local community through a sense of shared responsibility, shared accountability, but more importantly shared ambition to raise aspiration in their areas. Schools governed collectively also strengthen their ability to collaborate with, challenge and support others. They also provide school-led system leadership from the ground up.

Some academies decide to enter into more formal partnerships with other academies through multi-academy trust (MAT) arrangements. In a MAT, a single trust is responsible for a group of academies. Academies in MATs can pool resources, share staff, benefit from economies of scale through centralising administrative functions and share best practice. As of 31 July 2014, there were 2,114 academies in a chain (53% of the total number of academies).

The department's internal research into 'what does good look like?' found that there is evidence that multi-academy trusts (MAT) can achieve better value for money across their chains. For example, combining and negotiating on contracts for utilities and other services, conducting joint recruitment exercises and achieving economies of scale on computer software. We have seen that collaboration within MATs can deliver opportunities for driving improvement in schools outcomes, for example, good MATs are better able to get the best out of their staff by moving talent around to meet skills needs in different schools. They transfer good practice from one school to another through

¹¹ DfE (2014) [Do academies make use of their autonomy?](#)

regular cross-school training and challenge opportunities at a senior level. The ability to be able to move staff between different schools in the trust can also lead to better retention, as opportunities for progression are more readily available and staff are able to build up a wealth of experience without leaving the trust.

The same research found that chains of academies tended to organise themselves in tight geographical clusters which they felt brought benefits in terms of efficiency and better inter-school working.

Case study: Lead. Empower. Achieve. Drive. (L.E.A.D.) Academy Trust

The founding schools of the L.E.A.D. Academy Trust were motivated to convert to academy status to achieve greater autonomy, including freedom over their finances. They were already supporting other schools who wished to convert in Nottingham and the surrounding area, and wanted to keep the established aspects of partnership and collaborative working. In October 2011, the lead school, Huntingdon Primary and Nursery School, along with two other local schools they were already collaborating with, converted to academy status. Together they set up the L.E.A.D. Academy Trust, an umbrella trust (UT) which brought schools together whilst allowing them to retain their own identity and community links.

In September 2013 the separate trusts under the umbrella came together as part of a newly-formed multi-academy trust (MAT). The new structure enabled the raising of academic standards through increased collaboration. The L.E.A.D. MAT now comprises 12 primary schools, with a mix of converter and sponsored academies. It has also sponsored a secondary school, thereby securing secondary expertise onto the trust. L.E.A.D.'s model is for their good or outstanding academies to support each sponsored academy –this approach could be replicated to provide support for up to 10 sponsored academies (with each good or outstanding academy supporting 2 sponsored academies).

Meeta Dave, headteacher of Radford Academy said: “We have benefitted from school-to-school support through the L.E.A.D. Academy Trust at all levels from senior and middle leaders to newly qualified teachers. In a small school where capacity is limited, school to school support was an effective strategy to drive school improvement at a pace which would not have been possible on our own. It is important to note that both schools benefitted from this partnership as good practice was shared between the schools.”

Pete Wood, headteacher of Millfield L.E.A.D Academy said: “School-to-school support through the L.E.A.D. Academy Trust has been a fundamental driver in our school improvement over the last two years. Through collaborative working and sharing of expertise and ideas staff have become more reflective practitioners.”