

# BEFORE JOINING A MULTI ACADEMY TRUST....

## Some prompts on information gathering (due diligence)

Multi academy trusts are being encouraged to invite local authority maintained schools and standalone academies to join their trusts. At the same time, schools and academies found by Ofsted to have a judgement grade less than good are being steered towards joining what are described by DfE as a “strong multi academy trust”.

Unless directed by DfE, **there remains no legal requirement for local authority maintained schools and standalone academies to join a multi academy trust.**

Whatever the trigger (invite or steer) schools/academies outside MATs are engaging in conversations with MATs.

Governors of each school/academy may arrive at a position where they wish to choose which (if any) MAT to join.

This can prove challenging. Governors are advised to keep the whole school community informed as they go through this process, listening carefully to their views. That said, critically, the best decision for the school/academy will be based on evidence, matched with governors’ understanding of the school’s/academy’s characteristics, aspirations, and needs.

To this end, I have posed a list of possible questions governors may choose to ask a MAT, the answers to which should assist in their decision.

The list is not exhaustive, but it offers a “starter for five”. They may need to be tweaked to match your own school’s/academy’s characteristics and circumstances. You may wish to add to, subtract from, or modify some of the questions in the list.

At the same time, governors should be seeking information about the prospective MAT, typically by using the DfE performance tables to scrutinise rates of attendance, exclusions, rates of pupil progress (particularly different pupil-groups), and Ofsted reports of academies in that MAT.

### INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS AND REMARKS

1. Why are you interested in this school/academy joining your trust?
2. Have you been directed/steered to approach us? Or is your invitation of your own volition?
3. What do you see as the benefits to your trust of our joining?
4. What do you see as the risks to your trust of our joining?

5. We assume you, as a responsible organisation, have undertaken due diligence on our possible joining of your trust. To this end you will have examined our governance, curriculum, staffing, finance, policies and plans.
6. We have certainly been finding out about your trust.
7. In the light of the information your due diligence on us has produced, we would like you to answer the following more detailed questions.

#### **QUESTIONS ABOUT GOVERNANCE**

1. We have a governing body. Would that governing body become the new “local governing body” (LGB) for our school/academy?
2. If it were to differ, then how?
3. What would be the constitution of the LGB?
4. What would be the terms of reference of the LGB?
5. What is the relationship between the LGB and trust board in terms of responsibilities and accountabilities?
6. Would we be able to elect one or more members of the LGB onto the trust board?
7. How would the trust listen to and respond to our school/academy voice (pupils, parents, staff & our local community stakeholders)?
8. How often would our LGB meet with the members of the trust board?

#### **QUESTIONS ABOUT CURRICULUM**

1. Would we continue to offer the pupils the same curriculum as now?
2. If it were to differ, then how?
3. We have broken our curriculum into schemes of work for each term. Would this continue?
4. If not, what is your plan?
5. Teachers in our school have autonomy over their pedagogical approach; typically, dependent on who is being taught, what is being taught, and what happened in the previous sequence of lessons. Will teachers retain this autonomy?
6. If not, what is the plan?
7. What are your views on mixed-age (mixed year-group) teaching?
8. What are your views on setting and mixed attainment pupil grouping?

9. How would you ensure that our curriculum remains accessible to all pupils? (eg SEN)
10. We have relationships with neighbouring schools and local community groups to extend and enrich our curriculum through shared educational and recreational activities. Would these be allowed to continue?

### **QUESTIONS ABOUT STAFFING**

1. Are you intending to keep the senior leadership team in its current form? If not, what changes will you make?
2. Are you intending to keep the teaching and teaching-support staffing as it is? If not, what changes do you intend to make?
3. We hear that back-office functions are likely to be “centralised” in a multi academy trust. What are the implications for all our administrative and site-management staff?
4. Are you intending to bring in any staff from other academies in your trust?

### **QUESTIONS ABOUT FINANCE**

1. What proportion of our existing school/academy budget do you slice as your management charge?
2. What is included in your management charge?
3. Are there other service charges, above and beyond the management charge?
4. Can you explain what these are, and give us a breakdown of these charges?
5. Will we have control over our devolved budget?
6. Can we procure goods and services on our own account? Or is procurement a centralised service? And if it is a centralised service, how much do you charge for this?
7. What happens to all our existing goods and services contracts?
8. Many of our staff are on funded professional development pathways. Will you continue to fund these?

### **OTHER QUESTIONS**

1. What is your trust’s knowledge and leadership capacity in our\* phase of education? (\*this could refer to, for example, early years, post-16)
2. Do you intend to change the name of our school/academy?

3. Do you intend to change or adapt our school uniform? If so, how and when?
4. Do you intend to change the pattern of our school day? If so, how and when?
5. Do you intend to change the term dates set for the year after next?
6. Do you intend to change our admissions arrangements? If so, how?
7. Which of our policies would be changed? Where would we see the biggest change from our present policies?
8. Do you intend to change our capital development plan in terms of improvements to our sites and buildings? If so, how?

### **CONCLUDING QUESTIONS AND REMARKS**

1. Should we join with your trust, what would be the biggest change we\* would notice
  - a) after the first week?
  - b) after the first term?
  - c) after the first year?

\*Please would you answer this question for pupils, parents, staff, governors and local community members.

Thank you for taking the time to provide us with this information which will help governors assess the benefits or otherwise of our school/academy joining your trust.