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Governors  
for Schools  
Conference  
2021.



Confederation  
of School Trusts

# The Power of the Group

## The Case for Collaboration

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# Confederation of School Trusts

- The Confederation of School Trusts (CST) is the national organisation and sector body for School Trusts in England advocating for, connecting and supporting executive and governance leaders.

# Different kinds of partnership

- Soft federations
- Professional development partnerships (Teaching School Alliances/ Teaching School Hubs)
- Improvement partnerships (e.g. peer review, NLEs etc)
- Contracted partnerships
- Hard Federations
- Multi-Academy Trusts

## Partnerships with shared governance arrangements

There is an emerging body of evidence beginning with an early large-scale study by Chapman and Muijs into what they called ‘performance federations’ – groups of schools in shared governance arrangements, including the early multi-academy trusts. The findings of this research suggest students attending performance federations outperformed a matched sample of their peers in non-federated schools in terms of their attainment.

Chapman, C. and Muijs, D. (2014) Does school-to-school collaboration promote school improvement? A study of the impact of school federations on student outcomes. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 25 (3), pp. 351-393

## What is a multi-academy trust (School Trust)?

A multi-academy trust is a group of schools working in deep and purposeful collaboration as one entity to improve and maintain high educational standards across the trust.

A multi-academy trust has a single legal and moral purpose at the heart of the Articles of Association: **to advance education for public benefit.**



The wrong question:

- “Should my school become an academy?”

The right question:

- “How can my school best collaborate with others in a strong and resilient structure to ensure that each child is a powerful learner and that adults have the opportunities to learn and develop as teachers and leaders?”

# What can School Trusts do?

- A group of schools working together in a single entity can do lots of things that are harder for stand-alone schools to do.
- Teachers work and learn together to improve the way they teach and schools can share practices that make a difference to the quality of teaching.
- Teachers and leaders can work together on the things that matter – like curriculum and assessment.
- In addition, schools where the quality of education is not yet good enough can be supported to improve.
- In the collaborative structure of a School Trust, it is more possible for teachers and leaders to move to another school to help improve the quality of education where that school is struggling – and these moves are more likely to be to schools with more disadvantaged pupils.

## Myths and facts #1

**Academy trusts are not businesses – nor are they run by ‘private’ people and they cannot make profit**

Academy trusts are education charities that are set up purely for the purpose of running and improving schools. Trustees have strict duties under charity law and company law. Trustees hold public office – they do not run the trust for ‘private’ interest but are required to advance education for public benefit. They are required to uphold the Principles of Public Life.

Sponsors, Trustees and/or Members cannot make profits. As education charities, academy trusts are not allowed to make profits or distribute profits to trustees or members. All surpluses are invested into the front-line to improve the quality of education.

## Myths and facts #2

### Academy trusts are part of state-funded education

Like any other state school, academies are free to attend, inspected in the same way, and children take the same tests and exam. Academy trusts are state-funded – parents do not pay fees. They operate in accordance with their funding agreement with the Secretary of State.

More than half of pupils in England are educated in academy schools. This is seven in ten secondary pupils and three in ten primary pupils.

Like any other state school, academy schools are free to attend, inspected in the same way, and children take the same tests and exams.

Academy trusts must comply with the same law on admissions as maintained schools, The DfE's model funding agreement for mainstream academies requires them to comply in full with the DfE School Admissions Code and the law relating to admissions.

## Myths and facts #3

**Academy trusts have the same legal responsibilities as maintained schools towards children with SEND**

Academy trusts are subject to most of the same direct statutory duties as maintained mainstream schools, in respect of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

As such, mainstream academies must:

- Have regard to the statutory SEND Code of Practice and use their best endeavours to make sure a child with SEN gets the support they need
- Designate a qualified teacher to be the SENCO and co-operate with the local authority in respect of a child with an education, health and care plan (ECHP)
- Admit a child where the school is named on that child's EHCP plan and ensure that pupils and their families are involved in decision-making and planning.

## Myths and facts #4

**Land is not passed into ‘private’ ownership and trusts need permission to sell land – just like maintained schools**

Academy trusts can have various tenure types, but most hold their sites on long leases from the local authority, for a nominal charge. There are controls on the disposal of academy and maintained school publicly funded land. The Secretary of State’s permission is required for the disposal of publicly funded school land or school land which has been enhanced at public expense.

## Myths and facts #5

### Academy trusts are highly accountable

Academy trusts are held to account to a higher standard than maintained schools. The obligation of transparency and accountability is much greater than maintained schools. They are held to account by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), Ofsted and Regional Schools Commissioners.

They are required to have an independent audit annually and to publish their accounts. They are also required to disclose pay in thresholds. If the ESFA investigates a trust, the investigation report is published on the government's website. There is no similar requirement on local authorities to publish investigation reports or disclose head teacher pay.

## Do Trusts improve pupil outcomes? #1

Statistical analysis by NfER on behalf of the Institute of Education in 2018 suggested that pupils in "convertor" multi-academy trusts tend to do better than pupils in comparable standalone maintained schools. Although the difference is not very big, it is statistically significant for all outcome variables that were considered across both primary and secondary phases.

Bernardinelli, D. and Rutt, S. Greany, T and Higham, R. (2018) *Multi-academy Trusts Do they make a difference to pupil outcomes?* NfER and IOE.

## Do Trusts improve pupil outcomes? #2

This is not the same for sponsor-led Trusts. But, as the Sutton Trust Report also in 2018 clearly acknowledges, most Trusts face a greater level of challenge in terms of their intake than the maintained state school average, and some (the sponsor-led Trusts) a very much greater level of challenge.

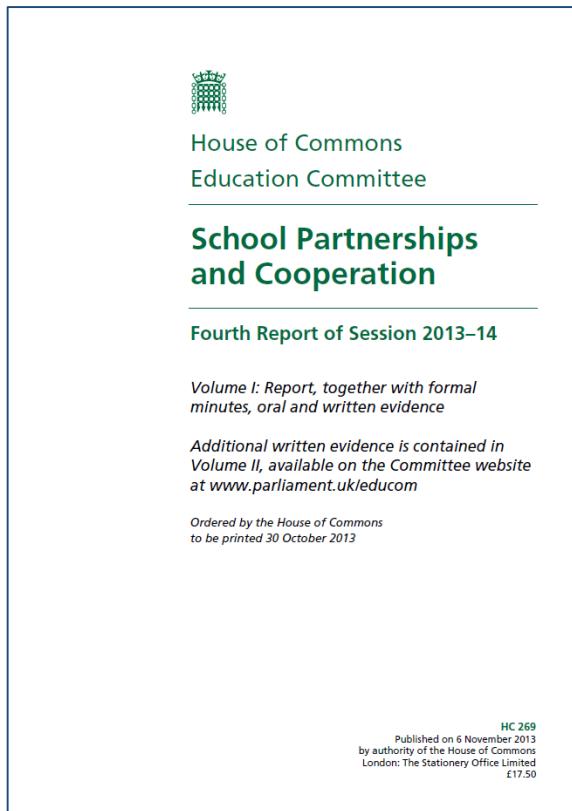
School Trusts also tend to have higher-than-average numbers of disadvantaged pupils – especially low-prior-attaining pupils. The authors of the Sutton Trust report conclude that this suggests Trusts have largely retained their original focus on pupils who need additional help and resources.

Hutchings, M. and Francis, B. (2018) *Chain effects 2018: The impact of academy chains on low-income pupils*, Sutton Trust.

## What about Ofsted?

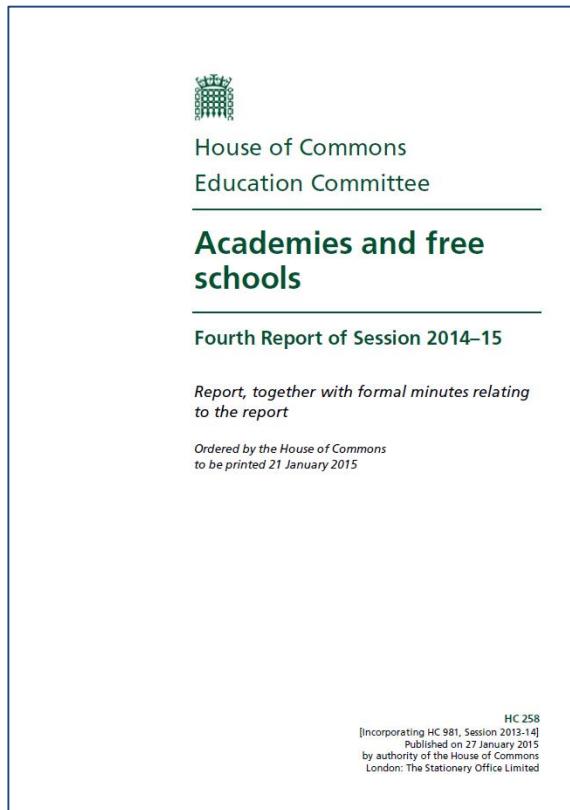
As of August 2020, 75 per cent of sponsored primary and secondary academies that have been inspected are 'Good' or 'Outstanding' compared to only around 1 in 10 of their predecessor schools.

# The evidence for the benefits of school partnerships



- “87% of headteachers and 83% of chairs of governors describe partnership with other schools as ‘critical to improving outcomes for students’.”
- “We believe that school partnerships **with clear lines of accountability and some element of obligation** are more likely to be successful.”

# The primary sector benefits particularly from collaborative structures



“Primary heads told us that, whilst becoming an academy had improved their practice and their school, this was primarily because of the advantages generated by the collaborative framework of a multi-academy trust.”

# Trusts as the vehicles for School Improvement

If we look back over the last ten years (and before that), very little education policy has met the test of robustness. For example, Ofsted, in its January 2020 evaluation report [Fight or flight? How 'stuck' schools are overcoming isolation](#), lists the sheer number of school improvement initiatives over the last twenty years.

Ofsted concludes that there was too much advice and that this advice was ‘thrown’ at schools without enough thought. They found that the quality of those providing advice and support was too variable. Ofsted found two circumstances which were perceived to work well and one of those is where designated leaders from staff within a Trust rather than outside of it worked in a sustained way to improve a school.

The strategic oversight and accountability inherent in the trust structure can drive evidence-informed school improvement. Other forms of school improvement (e.g. local authority services, formerly teaching schools, national leaders of education) have no direct accountability and therefore limited impact.

## Evidence from the pandemic

CST asked Ofsted to delve a bit deeper into the ways in which trusts are supporting their schools through the pandemic. Ofsted opened an additional evidence card during the Autumn interim visits.

For the school leaders Ofsted spoke to, the support of their trust was crucial. They told Ofsted about support with safeguarding, interpreting COVID-19 guidelines, developing remote learning and integrating this with the curriculum.

Professor Daniel Muijs and Karl Sampson summarised the findings in this article, [The trust in testing times: the role of multi-academy trusts during the pandemic.](#)

## The Trust in Testing Times - conclusions

Muijs and Sampson conclude: “One of the aims of bringing schools together in trusts is to provide them with levels of support and collective learning that would not be achievable for any school on its own. These findings show how important this can be to schools’ resilience in the most challenging of circumstances, and how being part of a greater whole builds that resilience. Trusts have supported the work of school leaders throughout the pandemic and seem to have done so quite successfully.”

# School Trusts as Robust Structures

The global pandemic has highlighted the role of public service and the value of education in society. School Trusts have been shown through the pandemic to be the most robust of school structures.

Robustness can be defined as "a system's ability to maintain its functions or characteristics in a relatively controlled and reliable manner in the face of external shocks or perturbations" (Campano and Woo, 2018).

Perhaps the biggest external shock to the education system within the last decade has been the shock of the global pandemic. It has been remarkable how groups of schools working together in School Trusts have been able to withstand the perturbations of the pandemic, and will be able to withstand future shocks as we recover from the educational, social and economic legacies of Covid-19.

## School Trusts as robust structures - new research

New [research](#) by the University of Nottingham shows that Trusts are robust structures. Researchers found that the collegiality of schools within Trusts was a key benefit during the coronavirus pandemic, with CEOs of Trusts reporting that they were able ease the burden on schools by centralising and redistributing tasks to allow schools to focus on teaching and welfare.

The study found that Trust schools broadened traditional definitions of 'disadvantaged' students, recognising that there could be two groups of those that are deemed vulnerable children during the pandemic. For example, there are those who come from lower socio-economic backgrounds and there are those who could be disadvantaged by both parents working full time and so could be experiencing emotional neglect. The schools in the study worked successfully to reduce disengagement in these groups.

**“There is no trust more sacred than the one  
the world holds with children.”**

Kofi Annan, The State of the World's Children, 2000



# Further reading

- Cruddas, L. CST's White Paper (2010) [The Future Shape of the Education System in England](#), CST
- Cruddas, L., 2020, [Systems of Meaning: Three Nested Leadership Narratives](#), CST
- Cruddas, L. and Simons, J., 2020, [School Trusts as New Civic Structures – A Framework Document](#), CST and Public First
- Cruddas, L. and Rollett, S., [A Bridge to the Future](#), CST
- Bauckham, I. and Cruddas, L., 2021, [Knowledge Building – School Improvement at Scale](#) CST
- Cruddas, L. 2021, [The Case for Collaboration](#), CST
- Oates, T., 2021, [Looking to the Future Without Trashing the Past](#), CST
- Rollett, S., 2021 [Coherence and Systemness: The Future of Assessment and Qualifications](#), CST



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Join the national organisation and  
sector body for School Trusts in England

Thank you

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