



Briefing Paper for Governors

Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs)

Introduction

Documents to be read alongside this paper:

- *Taking the Next Step – A Guide to Forming or Joining a MAT, NGA, ASCL & Brown Jacobson, May 2022*
- *Grammar Schools and Multi-Academy Trusts, GSHA, February 2022*
- *Summary of 2022 Schools White Paper, ASCL, March 2022*

Context

Government ambition (Schools Bill) for all state secondary schools to be in a MAT (“family of schools”), or on a journey to be so, by 2030. There is a stated objective of MATs with potentially 10+ schools (7,500-10,000 students).

National picture for grammar schools

- 163 Grammar Schools: 90 in MATs; 73 not
- 97 GSHA (Grammar School Heads Association) members: 41 in MATs; 56 not
- 20 SSGS (Successful Selective Girls’ Schools) members: 8 in MATs; 12 not

Grammar Schools

Mark Fenton, (Chief Executive, GSHA) noted that in work with Govt/DfE, the authorities seem to be open to the idea of grammar school exclusive/grammar school dominant MATs (see SLA’s GSHA Conference notes below)

Initial Ideas:

- Conventional – be absorbed into an existing or new MAT.
- Exclusive to be inclusive – establish or join a grammar-focused MAT to benefit the wider secondary & primary sectors (see extract from GSHA Briefing Paper below).
- Pioneering for able girls – establish or join a selective girls' school MAT.
- Pioneering for girls generally – establish or join a girls' school MAT.
- Progressive for all – establish or join a MAT with an eclectic mix of schools to share expertise and strengths in relation to teaching the most able, with a broader objective to ‘challenge all – excellence for all & excellence from all’. This could be with MESH (Mid-Essex Secondary Heads) schools, e.g. KEGS, Chelmer Valley, Great Baddow, Sandon, etc.

- More ambitiously, rather than linking with other schools in a conventional MAT relationship immediately, could we progress our girls' education work by establishing an annex, as done in Kent, in an area of need (current or projected lack of school places - London, Essex, Suffolk?), to expand the selective girls' education offer.
- Even more ambitiously, again, rather than linking with other schools in a conventional MAT relationship immediately, could we progress our girls' education work by establishing a new sister school in an area of need - a girls' school, non-selective (could have some selection, as comps currently do re: sport, music, etc.), 11-16, possibly with a particular focus, e.g., STEM, STEAM, mathematics, languages?

GSHA Annual Conference, The RAF Club, Wednesday 8th June 2022 (SLA's notes)

Ministerial Address, Nadhim Zahawi, Secretary of State for Education

- Thanked HTs and SLTs for their hard work during the pandemic period.
- Acknowledged that there are concerns about the White Paper.
- Referred to grammar schools as "brilliant schools".
- Said grammar schools would continue to play a vital role in the education sector.
- Noted that selection would be protected within MAT structures, by law.
- "It is in all our interests that grammar schools continue to flourish."
- Noted that he wants the MATs programme to facilitate the spread of grammar school benefits, expertise, etc.
- Listed things that grammar schools are doing re: fair access: changes to tests, familiarisation materials, outreach programmes, support with uniform costs, etc.
- Wants grammar schools to drive social mobility.
- Did not answer a question about whether more grammar schools could be established. Focused his answer on MATs.
- Noted that 90/163 grammar schools are currently in a MAT of some kind.
- Highlighted the importance of high-performing MATs, stating that under-performing MATs will be challenged more robustly in the future.

Q&A on MATs, Dr Mark Fenton, GSHA CEO, Michael Brotherton, Stone King LLP

- MATs and preserving selection was asked for by GSHA, and this is now in the Bill.
- DfE now "more open" to groups of grammar schools coming together in a MAT, which is very encouraging.
- GSHA has asked for a special funding agreement for a MAT with a grammar school in it to protect selection over time, i.e. to mitigate the risk of diluting selection over a period of years by moving from a selection score to a qualifying score.
- Noted that something more than a robust Scheme of Delegation (which can be changed) is needed, thus the funding agreement (which is a legally binding document) point above.
- Mark Fenton thinks the MAT programme is here to stay, irrespective of the Govt - he noted that there is strong support within the DfE bureaucracy for this.
- MATs have been pushed by both the Labour Party and the Conservative Party over time, so Mark Fenton does not see MATs as a political issue - they are strengthening and evolving policy reality.

Extract from GSHA Briefing Paper – Grammar Schools and Multi-Academy Trusts (February 2022)

Grammar Schools should be allowed to form MATs composed solely of other selective schools, provided there was a clear commitment to engage in system-wide improvement. This would alleviate many of the concerns of members, including those related to watering down selection, funding, and capacity to provide meaningful school-to-school support. For example, five grammar schools operating together in a MAT could release capacity for school-to-school support in a way which would be impossible for one selective school which was a minority part of a MAT comprising one grammar and four comprehensives. In common with Church of England and Roman Catholic schools, Grammar Schools should be treated as a distinct group which makes a unique contribution to the English education system. The government should explore an MoU with the sector as a precursor to the future creation of a nationwide Grammar School MAT to serve schools in areas with few other selective schools who are concerned about being a lone voice within a largely non-selective local MAT.

Action so far:

- ❖ Context – Governors have considered the MAT question over a period of years. Decided not to pursue establishing or joining a MAT.
- ❖ Since the publications of the Schools White Paper/Bill:
 - HT and SLT thinking and discussion, informed by GSHA and ASCL material.
 - MC govs updated and key documents shared with govs.
 - HT attended meetings, including ASHE and GSHA.
 - Research/meetings already undertaken or being arranged concerning the local and national MAT picture, including:
 - Tom Carter (KEGS HT)
 - Paul Farmer (Great Baddow HT)
 - Jonathan Duff (Regional Schools Commissioner)
 - HTs of other SSGS institutions not currently in MATs
 - HTs of local primary schools not currently in MATs.

SLA, June 2022