

Drive for stronger school system to benefit all pupils

An education at a Good or Outstanding school that is part of a strong multi-academy trust has today (28 April) been hailed by the Education Secretary as a key part in building back better from the pandemic.

In his speech to the Confederation of School Trusts annual conference, Gavin Williamson said the government's vision is for the school system to continue to move decisively towards a single model built on strong multi-academy trusts as its foundation, bringing the current pick-and-mix system of local authority maintained and standalone academy schools to an end.

All schools have gone above and beyond through the pandemic, with all teachers and staff playing a vital role in the country's frontline response. But the pandemic has brought to the fore the benefits of strong multi-academy trusts in providing outstanding support for both children and staff, through their collaborative approach and being able to pool resources and knowledge.

The Education Secretary also stated his ambition to bring schools with a history of long-term underperformance, which have had three consecutive Requires Improvement or worse judgements by Ofsted, into strong multi-academy trusts. He committed to consult fully with the sector on any such changes.

All schools will now have the option to 'try the academy experience before they buy' – associating with multi-academy trusts for a defined period to experience the benefits for themselves and their students, with no commitment.

A new National Behaviour Survey will also be launched to give parents a termly snapshot of the state of behaviour in schools, including disruptive behaviour and bullying. It will not be an accountability tool, but will provide parents and stakeholders the data they need to build a picture of behaviour in schools over time and improve the government's ability to support schools with any challenges they are facing.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

I know from my own experience, that when parents set out to choose a school for their child, they want something very simple – a Good or Outstanding school with excellent teaching, in a wider school environment that supports their child to fulfil their potential.

And this is exactly what parents can expect when their child's school is part of a strong multi-academy trust. The vast majority of Requires Improvement or Inadequate schools that become an academy and join a trust go on to be rated at least Good the next time they are inspected.

That is why I am determined to finish what we started and end the pick-and-mix approach to school types, building back fairer from the pandemic to make sure every parent has the certainty that their child is at a school that is backed by a strong trust.

This is one of the most important things I can do to make sure every child has the opportunity to catch up on any education, development or emotional support they may have missed during the pandemic.

The new National Behaviour Survey builds on the £10 million Behaviour Hubs programme, matching the best multi-academy trust leaders and academy heads with partner schools and trusts to help embed outstanding behaviour policies that support children to thrive.

Further new interventions to encourage and support schools to join a strong multi-academy trust include:

- An expanded £24 million fund due to launch in May to develop more, and grow existing strong multi-academy trusts, providing more capacity for trusts to take on and support schools converting into academies
- [Updated guidance for trusts](#) and prospective academy converters, published today, which sets out how strong trusts improve educational outcomes, how local authority schools can convert and the support they can expect to receive
- A pilot programme, in partnership with the Church of England and Catholic Church, to set up new faith academy trusts, as well as a new turnaround trust to support Catholic schools in need of intensive support
- An [updated trust and school improvement](#) offer, providing underperforming schools with leadership support to help drive progress

STEP Academy Trust, based in the South East, is amongst those already allowing prospective partner schools to 'try before they buy'.

Leora Cruddas, chief executive of the Confederation of School Trusts said:

There is power in a group of schools working together in a single accountability structure. Multi-academy Trusts are education charities that run schools to give children a better future. They are a new civic structure created with the sole purpose of advancing education for public benefit.

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. 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.

Mark Ducker OBE, CEO of STEP Academy Trust said:

Working within a time-limited partnership arrangement gives both parties an opportunity to explore whether there is true alignment in their mission, vision and values before making a long-term commitment.

For STEP, this has been the main benefit of such arrangements and it is why we favour this approach. It is our experience that, through the process, a genuine consensus emerges in how partners need to work moving forward if they are to become more than the sum of their individual parts.

The government is due to set out further interventions in the coming weeks to make sure every child has the support they need to catch up on any learning missed during the pandemic and recover from any wider impact the pandemic may have had.

Hamid Patel CBE, CEO of Star Academies, said:

The pandemic has shown us that strength and resilience are gained through collective effort and collaboration. Strong values-driven trusts with children at their hearts have the capacity to recover and to engineer their own futures in a way that standalone schools cannot. They have huge potential to transform pupils' lives and those of the communities they serve.

Lorrayne Hughes, CEO of Cumbria Education Trust, said:

The true power of academies comes through their being in a single entity with other schools – the academy trust. Strong school trusts allow deep collaboration between staff, and the freedom for leaders to lead and teachers to teach, therefore creating the best conditions for a first-class education to be provided to children and young people.

Jo Coton, CEO of NET Academies Trust, which runs six primary academies in

Essex and Waltham Forest, said:

I have long believed in the merits of academy trusts – groups of schools working together allow for the best sharing of good practice between colleagues and for excellent professional development opportunities. Together these drive great teaching, in turn delivering the best education for children. The trust model maintains excellence in good schools and is the best way to rapidly improve weaker ones.

Covid-19 has shown the importance of being in a strong trust. The last 14 months have created unprecedented demands on all schools but our strong trust's structure has allowed us to withstand these pressures, still deliver the best outcomes for our pupils, staff and parents, and mitigate the educational, social and health impacts.

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