

Education Secretary speech to the Confederation of School Trusts

Hello. I am delighted to be speaking to you today. The coronavirus pandemic has been keeping people apart for more than a year. In that time, our education communities have been tackling the enormous challenges this has meant for schools. So before I go any further, I want to congratulate you for your leadership and resilience.

But slowly, we are inching our way back to normality. And I am delighted that I can speak to you today because I have been impatient for some time now to share an ambitious vision for our country's schools.

Today over 50 per cent of pupils in state-funded education study in academies. But we want to go further because strong multi academy trusts are the best structure to enable schools and teachers to deliver consistently good outcomes for all their pupils.

The government's vision is for every school to be part of a family of schools in a strong multi academy trust.

For me, it is not about ideology, nor am I proposing structural change just for the sake of it – our ambition is for more schools to benefit from being part of a strong family because multi-academy trusts are the best way to advance education for the public benefit and can deliver clear benefits for teaching and pupil outcomes.

The difference with the multi academy trust model, and we see it again and again, is that the strongest leaders can take responsibility for supporting more schools, developing great teachers, and allowing schools to focus on what really matters – teaching, learning and a curriculum that is based on what works.

We have seen throughout the pandemic how schools have kept children learning, either in person or remotely.

But what we have seen from strong multi academy trusts is their ability to respond quickly, to direct resources to the schools that need them, supporting teachers to concentrate on frontline teaching.

Many have gone even further, helping schools outside their own academy trust so that other pupils in the wider community can benefit.

Standards in certain areas of the country have been too low for too long we need our best leaders and trusts to drive change and level up opportunity.

Today we have published guidance for trusts and prospective converters, outlining how even more schools can join a strong family to turn that 50 per cent of pupils studying in academies into 100 per cent.

During the summer term – we will be undertaking research and speaking to school leaders, taking on board what they tell us as we seek to make the process of joining a multi academy trust as easy as possible.

I'm not saying that every academy is a world-beater. The performance of academies varies, like that of all schools. But through the support of strong multi academy trusts, we have seen many previously underperforming local authority-run schools transformed after becoming sponsored academies.

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.

So how do they do it? How do our strongest multi academy trusts enable improvements in pupil performance that is both sustainable and long-lasting?

I know from conversations with many of you that multi academy trusts very often share certain characteristics: many will have, for instance, leaders who know the value of working together for the greater good, as well as strong and effective governance; they will no doubt have a knowledge-rich curriculum; they will have a culture where good behaviour is the norm.

Trusts are also enabling teachers to develop and deliver their best teaching using the latest research and evidence. They are supporting teachers throughout their career journey – from preparations to deliver the Early Career Framework reforms, to longer-term career routes that allow teachers to move around schools and develop their expertise where it is needed most.

One powerful example is the Durrington Academy Trust in West Sussex, which has identified six key principles for teaching that they know work and embedded these in everything they do, enabling all staff to focus on great teaching, day after day. It's simple but incredibly effective. In other words, it works.

We're investing in strong multi academy trusts like this, so they can support even more schools.

The short film this morning illustrated some of the excellent work undertaken by Dixons. They are a trust based in Bradford and Leeds, achieving some of the best outcomes for pupils in the country. Their soon to be established hub in Liverpool, has already provided vulnerable maintained schools with support during the pandemic.

In the coming years we hope that Dixon's Liverpool hub will introduce its Teaching Institute, and will carry on offering continued professional development to teacher trainees, newly qualified teachers and those teachers who want to one day lead their own schools.

This is what I mean when I say strong trusts exist to advance education for the public benefit, they focus on what they know will improve outcomes for pupils and think beyond their own schools. And when pupils benefit, we all benefit.

Strong multi academy trusts also gain from the greater efficiencies which linking together makes possible; they are able to use evidence of what works to guide curriculum models and develop resources that help reduce teacher workload.

Their single governance structure makes all of this possible and is a more effective model than other examples of collaboration, such as federations and alliances.

I'd like to be absolutely clear here. Improving outcomes for pupils is our number one priority and the one thing that everything else hinges on. As we build back better from Covid, that is more critical than ever before.

Already we know that many pupils have lost ground because of the disruption caused by the pandemic. For those who are in schools that are struggling, this will mean catching up will be even more of a challenge.

I am not prepared to let children miss out in this way and I know that you aren't either.

I want to see us break away from our current pick-and-mix structure of the school system and move towards a single model. One that is built on a foundation of strong multi academy trusts. And I am actively looking at how we can make that happen.

Education recovery will involve a wide package of support, and I have asked Sir Kevan Collins to take the lead in advising on how we can do this most effectively. We are determined that we build resilience throughout the sector so that no school is left isolated and that we have the right system in place for all schools to recover.

The benefits of multi academy trusts were already clear but have become more apparent during this pandemic. Take Bishop Hogarth multi academy trust, with schools located in County Durham, Darlington, Hartlepool and Stockton. Not only did it provide high-quality remote learning and strong support to vulnerable pupils but the school also helped create PPE for the local NHS workers and care homes.

This shows how the model can be a catalyst in every community. It is no longer viable for schools to be single entities – the pandemic has shown us that a school that stands alone is very often a weaker school. What is needed is the safety net of a strong family and the best family is an academy trust.

This is such a critical mission for our children not just today, but in the years to come, that I am not prepared to leave it to chance.

I can today announce a number of new measures to support schools to become part of that vision, giving them the chance to benefit from being part of a strong family of schools.

As I have already mentioned, we are today publishing our updated good practice guidance which sets out how strong trusts improve educational outcomes. This sets out expectations of strong trusts, how a school can join

one, and the support they can expect to receive.

I am committed to see a system that brings the greatest benefits to the greatest numbers and to do this we need a clear regulatory framework that can support strong trusts. We also need to be able to address issues in the small number of cases where they arise.

Providing clear guidance for trusts will support our vision for strong families of schools led by strong and effective governance and this year the Academies Financial Handbook will be updated to bring greater clarity to our guidance.

As I said earlier, the golden thread running through academisation is that we must constantly advance education, improving outcomes for children and levelling up communities. As Leora said earlier this morning, multi academy trusts are the best structure for improvement, and we want a system that's the best at getting better.

Through the next phase of the Trust Capacity Fund, we will release up to £24m over the 2021-22 financial year to help trusts to grow. We especially want to support strong trusts, and strong schools forming trusts, so that they are better able to take on underperforming schools in areas of high need.

While there are many strong Church of England and Catholic academy trusts, as a group, they have a smaller proportion of academies compared to non-church schools.

The department is therefore launching a pilot programme, in partnership with the Church of England and the Catholic Church, to set up new Church academy trusts.

We are also working with the Catholic Education Service and their Dioceses to establish a new turnaround trust to specifically support Catholic schools in need of intensive support whilst dioceses increase their own trust capacity right across the country.

We are also developing an idea that originated with some of our leading trusts, which makes it easier for maintained and stand-alone schools to explore the benefits of joining a strong trust.

Schools can 'try before they buy' and see for themselves first-hand what being part of a strong trust involves.

We are setting up a process for them to temporarily partner with a strong trust, to experience the benefits that being part of a trust would offer them, their pupils, and their wider school communities.

I see no reason why every local authority-maintained school in the country shouldn't consider taking up this opportunity as soon as possible, to put them in the best position to decide whether joining a specific trust is right for them.

One example of a multi-academy trust already allowing schools to 'try before

they buy' is STEP – located in South London and East Sussex.

We will continue to offer school improvement support from selected system leaders who are able to help guide vulnerable schools. Many are drawn from academy trusts that already have an excellent reputation. From September, where those schools are already part of trusts, we will also provide funding to support selected leaders in these schools and trusts so that they can gain professional qualifications in executive leadership.

We also have a pool of experts in governance who will be able to advise and strengthen the trust's oversight of school performance. For maintained schools, we will offer funding to help set up a trust partnership. These reforms aim to not only improve schools, but to provide world-class leadership development, and together will ensure the greatest scope for school improvement over the long term.

I am clear that we need to improve schools with a history of long-term underperformance. These are the schools which have been judged requires improvement or worse by Ofsted in their last three consecutive full inspections.

I want to bring these schools into strong multi-academy trusts, and I hope to be able to share more details in due course. I will of course consult fully with the sector before making these changes.

One of the things that we see over and over again in high-performing multi academy trusts is a consistent mindset of excellence.

Excellence has many faces and not all of them are academic. Our best schools share a tireless focus on good behaviour and discipline.

Disorderly classrooms don't just have a significant impact on children's ability to learn. They can equally have an effect on a child's mental health and wellbeing. This has always been the case. It is not a Covid byproduct. Every classroom and every playground should be a wholesome and carefree environment where every child can develop and learn and play. No parent wants to send their child to a school where bullying is rife.

So it is vital we have calm and orderly schools where pupils are able to study and learn without interference from others and where, critically of course – teachers can teach. I know that so many of the Trusts represented here today already have strong and effective behaviour policies and, just like a strong curriculum or inspiring teaching, I want this to be the case in every school in the country.

One thing I am absolutely convinced about is that every school should be mobile-free. Mobile phones are not just distracting, but when misused or overused, they can have a damaging effect on a pupil's mental health and well-being. This is not acceptable. I therefore fully support head teachers who ban mobile phones from the school day.

We are going to be consulting on how we can help more heads remove phones from the school day, alongside other revisions to the behaviour and

discipline and expulsions guidance, later on in the year.

I have just announced the first 22 of our planned behaviour hubs. These are schools and multi academy trusts which already have a record of maintaining orderly and well-disciplined classrooms. They will be sharing their expertise and advising other schools how to address some of the common problems which all schools face at some point.

The first schools have now been matched up and training has begun. Applications for the next cohort of schools have opened, and will begin receiving support in September.

I also intend to go further and I am committed to focusing on reforms needed to deliver far better outcomes for children and young people in Alternative Provision who are most at risk of expulsion and disengaging from education. As the majority of these pupils have special educational needs, we are working with key stakeholders and will set out plans in the forthcoming special educational needs review.

We know that as well as the most severe forms of misbehaviour, such as bullying and sexual abuse, there is a persistent problem of low-level disruption in too many schools. This damages learning and is a major cause of teachers leaving the profession. The report, 'It Just Grinds You Down', by Policy Exchange, found that 75% of teachers think that low level disruption occurs frequently or very frequently in their schools and that 72% of them know a colleague who has left the teaching profession because of bad behaviour.

The department's own School Snapshot Survey two years ago also found that two-thirds of teachers who responded felt dealing with misbehaviour had a negative impact on their own wellbeing.

I can announce today that we will be launching a new national Behaviour Survey to give a regular snapshot of the state of behaviour in our schools.

The National Behaviour Survey will run once a term from next academic year, and will give an accurate picture on how good school behaviour is – and whether it is getting better or worse.

I want to make absolutely clear that this will not provide school-level data, or be used as a school performance measure. Instead, it's going to allow us to build up a national picture of behaviour in schools over time and act as a signpost to what schools need. The survey will cover low level disruption, bullying and other incidents of challenging behaviour.

We will be commissioning the National Behaviour Survey shortly, in order to begin running in the next academic year.

All these reforms sit alongside the improvements we have made to teacher training as part of the Early Career Framework, so that all new teachers will be shown how to effectively manage behaviour in their first two years in the profession from September 2021.

The Early Career Framework will directly support those at the start of their teaching careers by ensuring new teachers are entitled to a structured two-year package of funded high quality professional development based on the best available evidence. Once fully rolled out, it will be backed by at least £130million a year in extra funding. Trust leaders have worked on the design of this framework and we expect that they will be able to be key deliverers of this programme.

The pandemic has taught us many things, but one of the single most valuable lessons we have learned is the importance of reaching out so that schools can work together and become stronger together, enabling every child to have the chance of a better future.

Leora spoke so eloquently about horizons that have no limits and this is something we see again and again in your schools – your horizons have no limits.

This is what I want for every school and every child.

I said earlier that our ambition is for all schools to be in a strong family of schools. I also said that this is not about ideology but this is about an ideal. That ideal drives everything I do as Education Secretary. Every single child should have the very best start in life we can give them and I am going to carry on pursuing this until it is no longer an ideal but it is a reality.

Thank you.