

# Ofsted: Let us inspect multi-academy trusts (MATs)

Ofsted has today published a report: [Multi-academy trusts: benefits, challenges and functions](#), which looks at MATs' influence on day-to-day practice in their schools and the extent of their impact on leaders and teachers.

Three quarters of academy schools now belonging to a multi-academy trust and Ofsted wants to be able to inspect the trusts, as well as individual schools.

Ofsted research finds academy schools are strongly held to account by MATs, but there is weak accountability of the trust itself.

The report finds that many MATs play a central role in setting school policies, monitoring performance, recruitment, and training. They are also legally responsible for their schools and therefore for the governance of them. However, the report also finds there is weak internal accountability at trust level.

Currently, Ofsted can only carry out summary evaluations of the quality of education provided by a MAT by inspecting a sample of their schools. It cannot inspect the trust itself nor make graded judgements.

[Ofsted Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman](#) said:

Three quarters of academy schools now belong to a multi-academy trust, whose job it is to make important decisions – not just about the financial management of their schools, but also what is taught in them, and how it is taught and assessed. Some MATs may control as many as 50 or more schools.

Given the power and influence of MATs, it's important that they are properly accountable to parents. The fact that Ofsted is unable to inspect trusts directly means parents and policy makers are only given a partial view of what is happening in our schools. This presents some very real risks, which we have seen highlighted by the recent failures of some academy trusts.

The report highlights that schools in larger trusts benefit from economies of scale, back-office support, training, career progression and recruitment. However, size has its drawbacks, and some MATs took on a large number of schools in difficulty quickly, without always having the central capacity and leadership required to improve them.

The report also finds that schools in a MAT are able to share data and

expertise, which many staff reported had particular benefits for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). However, getting everyone together in the same place can be costly, time-consuming and frustrating, particularly if the geographical spread of a MAT is wide.

The report recommends that trusts make full use of opportunities to standardise functions provided by the MAT structure. Developing subject curriculums, which may be beyond the capacity of individual schools, is one example where more trust-level activity could be beneficial.

For this research, Ofsted visited 41 MATs and 121 schools with a diverse range of characteristics.

Evidence was gathered from over 700 interviewees, including:

- MAT chief executive officers (CEOs)
- headteachers
- local governors
- middle leaders
- representatives from MAT boards