

DSAT CEO note to any school interested in joining a Multi Academy Trust.

If you are reading this and you are considering joining a Multi Academy Trust, then good luck on your journey.

Having met with many Head Teachers, Governing Bodies and parents during consultation meetings, I am always asked one question. What will happen to our school uniform? To the casual observer this could look like an unimportant question, but it actually gets to the really serious question: "If I join your MAT, will this school lose its identity?" The answer is a resounding no. This line of enquiry strikes to the heart of what DSAT stands for.

I always tell people there is no such thing as a typical DSAT school. We are currently comprised of 15 individual academies, of which 14 are church schools, but as we grow the proportion of non-church schools is likely to increase. The differences between our academies are stark. For example, across DSAT a total of 25% of our pupils would be classed as Pupil Premium, but the number in a single academy can vary from below 10% to over 50%. The percentage of EAL children can vary from 0% to over 70%. SEND children can vary from under 10% at one academy to over 33% at another. This highlights why a 'one size-fits-all' approach will never work for us and why we certainly have no intention to have one identity or one uniform.

DSAT believes that schools must serve their community and meet the needs of their children. What works best cannot be decided from a head office or the imposition of a school practice that works elsewhere. A school's local leadership must decide this.

What binds DSAT, and what is common across all our schools, is a high standard for progress and aspiration and the view that school should be a happy and safe place where no child should get lost in the averages. A high performing school must deliver for everyone.

Ultimately, to join DSAT is to sign up to wanting greater school improvement collaboration that is structured and challenging. The idea of taking on board support and giving it back is vital and one of the pre-requisites to joining us.

The central cost contribution or 'top-slice', as it is often referred to, is below the typical figure. We see the need to keep money in the classroom so that it is invested in teaching and learning resources. If I am honest, we also believe that we are highly effective in the application of procurement strategies and DSAT does like to challenge established 'norms'. I would encourage anyone looking at a MAT as an option to interrogate the top slice. This will be a good indicator of what matters in that MAT and how much central imposition will follow.

I am encouraged that no single school or academy that has joined our MAT has any regrets and anyone who is thinking about joining can be directed to any one of our individual academies for a discussion on what it is like to be a part of DSAT.

Can I also reassure you about that word 'Diocese' and the 'Church' identity: It just so happens that we grew out of a collection of Church schools and collaborated initially to support a Diocese wanting to maintain the identity of its schools. We are equally as passionate to ensure the identity of schools that are not church schools - indeed the Diocese itself is very keen to stress this.

Finally, you will find MAT's with better websites and glossy brochures. I make no apology for this, as we invest our money into the children, not into advertising.

Andrew Waldron - CEO