

What Trust Schools Offer

department for

education and skills

creating opportunity, releasing potential, achieving excellence

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Standards in schools have risen steadily since 1997 thanks to the commitment and hard work of all those working in them and with them. Since then, what has become acutely clear is that schools do best when they work in partnership and collaboration with others. They achieve most when they work with and learn from other schools; when they harness the enthusiasm and expertise of external partners; and when they work closely with their local community. We now need to make the most of, and build on, these strengths to ensure that all children have the best opportunities and reach the highest standards.

Acquiring a Trust will be a way for schools to raise standards through strengthening collaboration and drawing on the expertise and energy of their partners to support their strategic leadership. Trust schools will be backed by an organisation which shares their aspirations for their pupils, knows their community, can support their continuing improvement and provides them with governors. And they will be able to do that within a sustainable and stable partnership, with clear aims and outcomes agreed at the outset.

There is no single blueprint for becoming a Trust – schools can choose who they work with, and how, in order to support the needs and aspirations of their pupils and local communities.

What can Trusts offer schools?

Trusts offer schools greater opportunity to secure the support of partners to strengthen their leadership and to develop their own ethos. In doing so, they will build diversity in the school system.

The experience of specialist schools' and Academies' interaction with their external partners, and that of Voluntary Aided and Controlled schools' foundation relationships shows the potential benefit for Trust schools. Trusts will encourage flexibility and innovation and will help create an environment in which pupils have access to a wider range of opportunities.

There is already a large amount of good practice and innovative thinking in this area both from external partners and foundations and from collaboration between schools. Trust schools will build on that experience. But sometimes collaboration is hard to maintain with the departure of specific individuals or a changing agenda, even after substantial time and effort have been expended by schools. Acquiring a Trust creates a long term, sustainable relationship that withstands changes in leadership and therefore maximises the investment schools make in collaboration. In addition, initial consultation with parents and engagement with partners in a formal framework will ensure there are clear objectives and common aims from the outset.

On top of that, there are practical benefits. Trust schools will enjoy all the flexibilities that come with foundation status, to employ their own staff and hold

assets, as well as setting their own admissions arrangements. The Trust will find and appoint committed Governors who will in turn be supported by the Trust. Schools will benefit from being part of a collegiate body that shares experience and expertise between the school and its Trust or, where there is more than one school, between each other. That in turn creates the opportunity for greater efficiencies in resources, and greater opportunities for workforce development. The Trust may bring a brand and a distinct and recognisable ethos to the school or group of schools. It should become easier to diminish risk around successful innovation, using ideas that have been tested elsewhere. And it will be easier to use the Power to Innovate, with the potential for flexibilities to be agreed centrally and made available to all schools supported by the Trust.

What's the rationale for businesses and others to be engaged?

Many *businesses* welcome the opportunity to engage in their local community or where appropriate across the nation, sharing expertise and skills with local schools and contributing to policy development. They also welcome engagement with young people who are going to be the employees of the future. Becoming part of a Trust makes it easier to work with a group of schools through a shared and formal framework and governance structure. It provides the opportunity to help build a culture of creativity, innovation and expertise in our schools.

Businesses also see advantages for the development of their own staff. Involvement in programmes such as Academies and Specialist Schools has proved popular with many employees and businesses are seeing improvements in staff morale and retention as a result.

Higher and Further education institutions can develop long term symbiotic relationships with schools in their local area or nationally, based around subject expertise or areas of particular interest. Across the country schools, colleges and universities are already developing partnerships to support the 14-19 entitlement, increasing choice for access for young people to a wide curriculum offer. These partnerships are also vital in raising aspirations and improving progression to higher and further education.

For *Local Authorities*, developing a range of Trusts in an area helps deliver their new duty to promote diversity in school provision that responds to parental choice. Trusts provide additional social and intellectual capital that can help to drive improvement in standards, particularly for deprived communities where the Schools Commissioner will play a key role in brokering relationships with the local community and parent organisations. The potential to secure efficiencies where Trusts support several schools will help local authorities to focus further on their commissioning role. Community based Trusts could also support other aspects of the local authority work, for example Children's Trusts, sustainable communities, health, housing, leisure or the New Deal for Communities.

What could Trusts help with?

It will be for individual schools to decide the kind of Trust that is most appropriate for them. Schools can build on the generic benefits of a Trust by choosing or shaping a Trust according to their own context. Different partners will bring different perspectives, experience and skills to support certain aspects of the school's mission.

Examples of what could be possible include:

- A partnership between a successful school and a weaker school can offer opportunities to both parties to **enhance leadership skills**. For the successful school it can present an opportunity to improve yet further, spread best practice, and enhance Continuing Professional Development and morale for all staff, whilst for the weaker school the partnership presents a chance to **gain access to new perspectives, support and expertise**.
- Working with further education and other training providers can give schools access to additional educational expertise – for example, in **developing the 14-19 curriculum**, broadening the choices available to young people and helping to raise their aspirations and expectations.
- Working with higher education colleges and universities can help schools **prepare young people better for advanced study**, provide important progression routes, and also create links between higher education staff, students and schools that raise aspirations and motivate school students.
- A network of schools working collaboratively could help to **raise standards and share best practice** in a specialist area. By affiliating this network to a university or training provider, the schools could also gain from subject specific professional development for staff.
- By engaging other local schools and partners in a Trust, schools could strategically manage a **collective responsibility for the five outcomes of Every Child Matters** at a local level, working alongside the local authority's Children's Trust arrangements.
- A school operating as a Trust with a business foundation could learn from its partners' expertise and benefit from **strengthened governance**.
- Working with other business and local partners in a strategic fashion **across a local community**, for example in a regeneration area, can create new opportunities for children and help to meet their individual needs.

What could a Trust look like?

There are many potential models and this is not a prescriptive list. Many Trusts could follow the three models below:

An individual school working with a Trust:

A school that has experienced difficulty could find that working with a Trust might help it develop and improve outcomes for its young people.

A group of local schools working with a Trust:

This could involve a number of schools working collaboratively to ensure a consistent offer locally, or to provide a range of experience for their young people that they were not individually able to offer. Whilst this already happens in many places, acquiring a Trust would clarify aims, objectives and expectations at the outset and mean that there was greater stability should, for example, individuals move on or agendas change.

A group of schools spread throughout the country working with a single Trust:

This approach could incorporate a business or charitable foundation supporting a network of schools nationally to provide expertise in developing a specialist subject in the curriculum.

There will be other models and there could be a number of partners, including other charitable organisations. A group of partners might be led by another education institution, for example from the higher or further education sectors, with business or charitable partners taking an important but minority role.

What is happening now?

The flexibility and range of options possible for Trusts is what gives them such enormous potential for all schools. The following case studies demonstrate the range of possibilities and the breadth of schools and partners that are already interested in seeing what Trusts could do for them.

The **Priory School in Lincoln** believes that becoming a Trust school will allow it to build on existing success, and create better links between schools and employers across Lincoln. It is a strong school, with good academic attainment and powerful educational ethos. It has just received an outstanding endorsement from Ofsted. The school, strongly supported by Lincolnshire County Council, is now considering establishing a Trust with a well-regarded local business partner and aims to share expertise and support with other schools in Lincoln. The Priory is already forging a productive partnership with nearby Joseph Ruston School under the executive headship of Richard Gilliland, and standards there are starting to rise.

Haybridge School in Worcestershire believes that it could consolidate its collaborative work by acquiring a Trust. This would allow it to build on its existing successes and create closer links with other local organisations. When it was inspected in October 2005, Ofsted said that Haybridge was an outstandingly effective school which succeeds in its aim of being an “innovative, energising school for both students and staff”. Haybridge plans to work with local businesses and its local authority to assess whether a Trust could support it in continuing to raise standards for its pupils. In future, the Trust might extend to other local schools if they wished to get involved, helping to raise achievement for all young people in the area.

Monkseaton Language College in North Tyneside already works closely with both the Open University and Microsoft. The partnership has supported a range of innovative projects including: an online ‘learning gateway’ for students and staff; the development of an IT foundation degree; enabling some pupils to take Open University modules; and developing and disseminating language resources for primary schools. Monkseaton and Microsoft are interested in developing their existing links into a Trust to grow the relationship and drive innovation, making the most of the expertise available in the partnership between business and education.

Solihull local authority is working with a private sector business consortium on a regeneration project across north Solihull. This will include the consortium building new schools to support a major regeneration of the whole community. The existing primary schools have a long tradition of partnership working, and the school reorganisation provides a great opportunity to extend this to support more schools in delivering extended services and child care and in building strong relationships with parents and the wider community.

An important question is what governance structures will best support the schools and their communities. A shared Trust could be the next step in providing security and sustainability, nominating governors and ensuring a close link between schools, the local community and the regeneration project.

The University of the West of England (UWE) already has excellent relations with a number of local schools. It was also one of the first universities to sponsor an Academy, which it supports through governance, advice, consultancy and professional development of teachers.

The university is interested in exploring how a Trust might build on these relationships, perhaps creating a hub and spoke model involving the academy and other schools, putting the links on a more stable and long-term footing, so that the expertise and skills the UWE offers not only supports specific projects, but strengthens the governing bodies that shape the direction and priorities of schools.

King Edward VI Foundation in Birmingham is an existing example of how schools could work with Trusts. It is responsible for five maintained (VA) schools, all of which are recognised as outstanding by Ofsted, and two independent schools. The foundation is incorporated under a Royal Charter. It has 24 trustees, four of whom are appointed by the local authority. The trustees collectively appoint governors to the five VA schools.

As well as providing strong leadership and governance, the Foundation's central office deals with finance, administration, purchasing and other core tasks, and can support heads in handling difficult case work. This not only shifts a lot of the administrative burden away from the heads, economies of scale also enable the foundation to employ specialists, driving up standards in management and leadership within each school.

Southend local authority is working in partnership with **Prospects College**, a vocational training provider, to establish a Trust school with leading edge vocational provision in Southend. The College and the new school will be located on the same site, in modern buildings designed to provide an inspirational learning environment. Prospects College will form the Trust, bringing its expertise and an external perspective to the management of the school.

In collaboration with the college, the new school will offer a combination of academic studies and up to 17 different vocational programmes. The authority's vision is that transforming the curriculum by making it more relevant, exciting, learner centred, and delivered by a range of specialists will re-engage young people and reignite their desire to learn. It is proposed that the new school will be an extended school offering a range of facilities to the local community.

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