



# **Embracing Change: Development Day Event Report & Recommendations 30<sup>th</sup> November 2016**



## Introduction

Marie-Claire Bretherton opened the day by noting the symbolism of running an event about such complex changes in schools and school leadership in a building that had represented such a significant source of support for school leaders over the past decade. She remarked that we had now entered a new era where it is now school leaders who are best placed to support one another to prepare for and plan for change – not government or its agencies. The profession, she said, has the passion, motivation and expertise to steer its own course – with support – and to do so in the best interests of children and young people at heart. She said it was important that colleagues approached the day with optimism about the future.

The origins of the day were rooted in the Kyra Heads' Forum back in March, the day on which – co-incidentally – the government's white paper 'Education Excellence Everywhere' had been launched. On that day, and since, leaders had supported one another to come to terms with the significance of the announcements and had continued to maintain those supportive conversations. During the summer, the government has back-tracked on its intention to compel (through legislation) every school to become an academy by 2022. However, in reality, given the significantly reduced role of local authorities in school improvement, the tighter financial climate, and the fact that multi-academy trusts are becoming such a force in the education landscape – no school can afford not to contemplate its options and to make an informed decision about its direction over the next three to five years.

The depth of support that exists within Kyra and the contribution that schools in the alliance are making to one another's development and improvement has never been greater. From Kyra's work in collectively training dozens of new teachers through to its programme preparing the next generation of headteachers for Lincolnshire's schools demonstrates how we are building capacity and ensuring quality of teaching and leadership at all levels. That is the basis of successful schools and must never be lost. However, what makes Kyra stand out is its ability to be strategic, to anticipate the changes and challenges that schools will face, and to involve all of its members in supporting one another to find solutions that put children's interests first. This development day – as

with previous development days – brings leaders, governors, school business managers and experts together to plan for the future.

Marie-Claire – quoting Sir Tim Brighouse - invited delegates to approach the day – and the changes and challenges discussed - with unwarranted optimism, an endless well of curiosity, and a complete absence of paranoia and self pity. Most of all, she said, we must approach the challenges with our ambition for children and young people across Lincolnshire at the centre of all we do.

### **Simon Bramwell, CEO Vantage Academies Trust**

Simon began by urging delegates to rise above ‘the noise’ that currently exists in the system and (quoting Simon Sinek) to: “Look down from as high as possible. Look ahead as far as you can see. Then decide what to do.”

Simon described his own journey from leading a standalone school to becoming CEO of a multi-academy trust of four schools (with two more due to open as free schools next year). The basis for the trust has been the improvement journey that Simon’s school – SS Simon and Jude’s - has been on. The school had been judged as special measures on Simon’s week of arrival as head in 2008, before being judged as 'good' in 2009 and ‘outstanding’ in 2016. This improvement journey has given the school and its staff a deep appreciation and understanding of what successful school improvement looks like –something that each MAT should be very clear on. The trust is also grounded in a long standing culture of and commitment to school to school support, as SS Simon and Jude’s is a national support school and both Simon and his team have substantial experience of working across schools in order to support their improvement. Simon commented that many of the Kyra schools in the room had already demonstrated a commitment to their own and to others’ improvement through their membership of Kyra and therefore had a strong basis for successfully navigating the changes to come.

He reflected on his own experience of converting to academy status and made some key conclusions:

- It had been a huge learning curve for him as a headteacher;
- It had not brought about any major changes on a 'day to day' level for his staff (with the exception of his School Business Manager);
- The growth of the MAT had brought more development and growth opportunities for his staff – either through secondments, through the various support and training delivered across schools, and through opportunities for promotion. This had also helped him to retain great staff;
- Joint procurement and purchasing had resulted in more resources for children and ensured access to specialist provision;
- There has been a general awareness (amongst staff and pupils) of 'being part of something bigger'.

Simon said that his trust's ambition was to grow so that it eventually serves 5,000 learners (across three hubs of 1200 – 1800 pupils) across the North West. This, he believes, will enable the trust to deliver a wide range of essential central services 'in house', ensure the capacity for delivering cross-trust training opportunities, and ensure that the trust is able to maximize economies of scale through the joint purchasing of external support and services.

Simon was clear that, from his point of view, the pace of change within education (and in society in general) is extreme. He told colleagues that they had a choice to make – to either plan for change and be proactive or to wait for change and react later to whatever is to come. Being proactive and planning ahead – whatever the action one decides to take - brings with it a certain amount of choice and freedom. Waiting to decide on an action later, he said, was leaving our fate in the hands of others.

***“Be clear. Not taking any action is not as simple as deferring a decision for later. With the pace of change as it is, not taking action is a decision in itself.”***

Simon spoke in more depth around some of the considerations that he felt heads and governors should be reflecting on.

He spoke around **weighing up the balance between freedoms and constraints** when considering joining a multi-academy trust. “MATs have constraints. There are some things that you used to do as an individual

school that you will no longer have the freedom to do in a MAT. The constraints vary according to the MAT, and can include area such as curriculum provision and assessment approaches, but are very likely to include constraints in areas such as the systems of financial protocols, HR policies, health and safety and the roles of local governors.” For many schools and leaders, he said, these constraints are a positive thing because they provide clear protocols and insurances – often in areas where headteachers are less confident and need that support and certainty. “If we join a club” said Simon “we can expect there to be certain rules and regulations – that’s the way of the world. As a school you need to be clear that those rules and regulations are ones that you are content to live by and adhere to. As a school creating a MAT, you need to be clear on the systems and protocols from the outset and make sure they are fit for the purposes of growth, organizational efficiency and school improvement.” He added that if those looking to join MATs were not completely content with certain limits and regulations on their autonomy that membership may bring, it was important that the benefits of joining the MAT outweighed these – not least the benefits experienced by pupils through improved learning opportunities.

On the issue of freedoms, for schools converting to becoming academies and academy trusts, these are extensive and involve freedom around curriculum delivery, staff terms and conditions (– which can mean improvements!), the types of partnerships schools can enter into, and the way resources are used and budgets are spent, etc. For those joining existing trusts, freedoms often arise through new opportunities – such as access to wider network of peers, the opportunity for staff to work across more schools and contexts, and opportunities to contribute to the design and development of provision across a number of schools.

Simon urged colleagues to think about both constraints and freedoms in terms of whether they are beneficial to children's learning. It is a case of being pragmatic as opposed to taking a stand for reasons that may not be based in educational considerations. Simon asked colleagues to consider whether “the adoption of any given constraint or the access to new opportunity for more freedom is going to make a difference to your children - that’s by far the most important consideration.”

A key issue for any governing body and leader preparing to join a MAT or form a MAT with others is what Simon described as the ‘non-

negotiables' or 'red-lines'. It was important that heads and governing bodies had an informed conversation about the vision, ethos and culture of their school and are clear about what must be guaranteed or secured throughout the process of joining or forming a MAT. Being clear about these 'red-lines' from the outset would mean that there would be no misunderstanding with the MAT and/or other schools throughout and beyond the process of joining or forming a MAT.

Simon then asked colleagues to **consider the importance of distinguishing between family and friends**. In an education system where funding is becoming tighter and where there is a shortage in some specialisms, is the partnership you are entering into truly going to take responsibility for your needs as a school? He said that there is a difference between feeling responsible and being responsible, and any successful trust or school partnership should be built on a unequivocal commitment to sharing resource and meeting needs in the interests of all schools and children. Would the schools you are working with be willing to share their best year 6 teacher?, he asked.

***“Feeling a responsibility for others is not the same as being responsible for others.”***

He asked colleagues to consider what the position would be if one school needed more support than another. Would you be willing to give up your reserves to support that school and its children? Would other schools in your partnership be willing to do so when it came to the crunch?

Simon was clear that becoming a successful multi-academy trust (and joining a multi-academy trust) requires a change in mindset, including for governors. “You have to think in terms of being a group of schools, a collective, not as an individual school and community” he said.

Simon drew to a close by asking colleagues to consider what he described as the eternal questions.

First he asked colleagues to consider the political context, and whether they believed that the agenda is going to be the same in three years' time and beyond? Simon – in his opinion – thought that it would, but no one has a crystal ball. Heads and governors must be realistic about the

future and plan accordingly.

He also asked colleagues to think carefully about the recruitment crisis. The quality of staff is central to the success of all schools. Which models, he asked, are going to ensure you are best placed to develop and access the teachers, leaders, and expert support staff in future? There is a particular challenge here around accessing specialist staff in a context where schools are increasingly having to 'buy in' support at high prices.

Next, he asked colleagues to consider the economic context that schools find themselves in. The Institute for Financial Studies has forecast that schools will face a real term cut of 8% over the next four years. There is a need for many schools to seize the opportunities of joint procurement, for buying at scale in order to achieve efficiencies, and for sharing resources and specialist staff that are not necessarily viable to sustain as an individual school.

And, in conclusion, he asked colleagues to consider carefully the expectations of Ofsted and the Regional Schools Commissioner, not least in their expectations around the way schools work together and support one another – particularly those in challenging circumstances. Is your school's current model sufficient to demonstrate a commitment to long term improvement and viability of delivering the highest education standards?

Simon ended by reminding colleagues that they should approach change:

- with a deep sense of clarity around their values
- with clarity about what they and their governing bodies see as being the non-negotiables or 'red lines' throughout any change – i.e. what MUST be guaranteed or secured through change
- being mindful that deciding not to act is a decision in itself,
- with the right of every child to a good quality education at the forefront of their minds, and
- with awareness of the changing educational and wider world around them. Change is happening now and it is our responsibility to respond to that in the best interests of children and young people.

## Emma Knights, Chief Executive, National Governors' Association

Emma Knights began by reminding colleagues of the paramount importance of governance – particularly as schools become more autonomous organisations with increased freedoms to make a difference to so many children and increased legal and corporate responsibilities and accountabilities. Governance is fundamental to the success and efficiency of any organisation, she said.

***“Governance determines who has the power, who makes the decisions, how other players make their voice heard and how account is rendered.”***

***Institute of Governance, Canada.***

Emma reminded colleagues of the three core functions of governing boards, namely:

1. Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
2. Holding the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils and the performance management of staff
3. Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money well spent.



Emma told delegates that in a multi-academy trust the governing body is known as the board of trustees. Trustees must have a clear reference to and understanding of the DfE's Academies Financial Handbook and the Governors' Handbook. A big question for those looking to join or establish multi-academy trust is how much responsibility is delegated to governors at a local school level – i.e. to the local governing board.

Schemes of delegation vary, but the responsibilities set out in these documents is ultimately held by the board of trustees.

Emma spent some time talking to delegates about the responsibility of governors in determining vision and strategic direction. All governing

bodies (and senior leaders) looking to join a MAT, create a MAT or simply considering its options for the future must consider the school's values and vision and where it wishes to be in the next three to five years. "It is only when you think about this that you can consider what other schools you may wish to be partnering with. Culture and ethos is so important, as are the relationships between the senior leaders and the governors."

***"It is only when you (consider your vision and your values) that you can then consider what other schools you may wish to be partnering with. Culture and ethos is so important, as are the relationships between the senior leaders and the governors."***

Emma encouraged governors and leaders to have deep conversations around their hopes and ambitions for their schools and children as a starting point, looking to what was important to them and to their communities in terms of the educational experience of children. She asked delegates to consider identifying what these outcomes would look like and how they could be measured, rather than approaching the future simply "working towards meeting top-down measures." Emma believes that these conversations will help schools embark on the next stage with a clear view as to what their MAT or school grouping should look like in terms of their vision, ethos and values. She encouraged schools looking to join a MAT to ask a lot of questions of the MATs they could potentially join, including the nature of the scheme of delegation to local school governing boards.

For those that wish to create a 'stepping stone' to academy status, Emma suggested that "Leaders may wish to consider federating first, bringing all the schools into one governing body and then separately consider whether you wish to convert to academy status."

Emma told delegates that the responsibilities around money have never been more significant than right now. In a tighter financial climate, making the most of money and ensuring the best use of resources is a key consideration - trustees / governors will need to be 'hugely realistic' about this.

**Emma then reminded delegates that there are some key principles for good governance which they should strive to hold onto at all levels of governance throughout any changes. These include:**

- 1. Getting the right people around the table**
- 2. Maintaining a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities**
- 3. Good chairing**
- 4. Professional clerking**
- 5. Good relationships based on trust**
- 6. Knowing the school – the data, the staff, the parents, the children, the community and ensuring engagement with stakeholders**
- 7. Committed to asking challenging questions**
- 8. Confident to have courageous conversations in the interests of the children and young people**

Emma referred to some specific issues within these areas. In terms of getting the right people around the table, there was a challenge around recruiting governors. She told delegates to look at a new website called 'Inspiring Governance' which had been set up by a number of organisations, including NGA and the DfE, to bring those who were keen to volunteer as trustees and governors together with schools looking to recruit to these roles.

Emma also advised colleagues to prepare for a 'change of mindset' when moving into formal groups of schools and specifically when establishing and joining a MAT. These included the need to look beyond the individual school and be willing to demonstrate the same responsibility to all schools across the group. She also advised that there is a significant business and financial responsibility associated with trusteeship of multi-academy trusts, and that colleagues should ensure they are well trained and prepared for this.

## Group Workshops

After lunch, colleagues met in professional groups, as governors/trustees, school business managers and school leaders.

### Governors/trustees

Governors covered three key areas. They highlighted the issues around recruitment of people with the calibre and breadth of expertise required to provide robust and strategic governance – particularly of the level required to govern a multi-academy trust. **They recommended that Kyra look at what it can do to support recruitment and whether there were any potential links that could be forged with Inspiring Governance. The group also recommended a buddy / mentoring programme – with experienced trustees of MATs supporting Chairs of governing bodies making the transition.**

The group also discussed the challenges around rising staffing costs in an era of increasing financial constraints, and **recommended the exploration of models of shared staffing – particularly for leadership and expert/ specialist roles – across schools.**

Finally the group felt that **it would be beneficial to receive some support around how governors/trustees visioning for the next three to five years and how they can make initial links and explore options for partnership with other schools as part of that process.**

### School Business Managers

The discussion centered around the financial challenges, and particularly the viability of small schools. The group **recommended that Kyra work with its small schools to ‘turn a negative into a positive’ and to identify ways in which the new landscape presents opportunities to achieve viability through economies of scale, joint procurement, and shared specialist roles (including business manager roles).**

As with the governors’ group, **the group also recommended some form of mentoring scheme through which those preparing to make the transition to MATs can access the advice and support of peers who had already been through the process.**

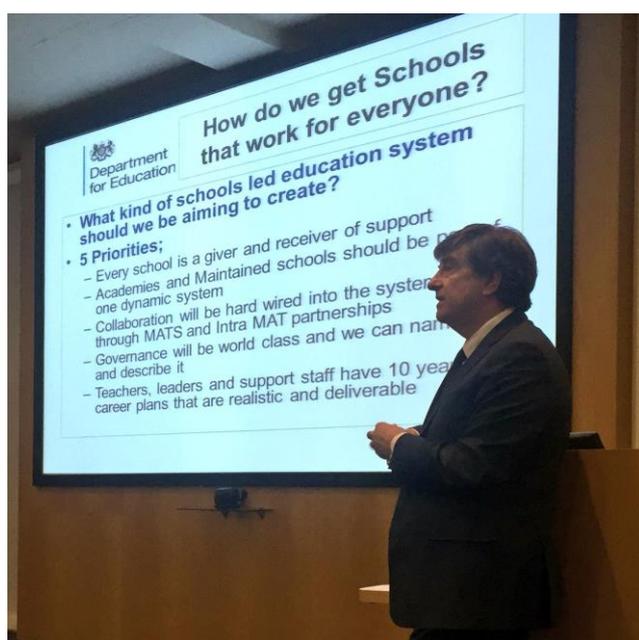
## Heads and School leaders

The heads' group were interested in how schools could prepare for change and develop new visions and models for the future, whilst keeping their options open as to whether they became or joined a multi-academy trust. Discussion in the group centred on the need to deepen commitments to partnership working – including addressing the challenging questions around protocols for sharing resourcing and staff without necessarily having a legal responsibility to do so. **A key questions was how do we – as an alliance of schools - begin to behave like the best MATs without all schools necessarily making the transition in the immediate future?**

### **Sir David Carter, National Schools Commissioner**

Sir David began with a very clear message to colleagues around the motivations for becoming a MAT: “If your main justification for becoming a MAT is economies of scale or finance for instance and not because it will improve outcomes for children and young people then don't do it.”

Heads and governors – he said - should make the transition on the basis of values and in the interest of improving educational outcomes.



Sir David told delegates a little about his role as Regional Schools Commissioner. Key aspects included holding academies – including ‘system’ and ‘national’ level trusts to account as well as managing the team of Regional Schools Commissioners so that they are effective in ensuring the accountability of MATs and academies at a regional level.

He explored the current context for the education system. The days of local authorities with 'armies' of school improvement experts able to support schools are over. Local Authorities' role is now to monitor the quality of schools that are not yet good enough and to facilitate the brokerage of support to those schools. He added that school leaders will never get a better time to lead the system, with the role of academy trusts and teaching schools being so extensive and so responsible for school improvement. He encouraged colleagues to embrace that role.

He outlined the scale of the challenge for the system. 1.3 million children are still attending schools that are judged as being in either Requires Improvement or Special Measures. The improvement of those schools is best achieved in the hands of expert and experienced leaders and teachers. The country's 21,000 schools need to be participants in the collective improvement of the system, and that means enabling not only outstanding but also good school to have a role in system leadership. Many good schools know more about improving from special measures and RI than some outstanding schools – their experience and knowledge can go a long way. Sir David added that School Business Managers and finance officers are going to become even more important to the success of schools and the education system in the coming years. Financial viability, he said, is key to the children's outcomes.

Sir David was clear that it is the quality of teachers and leaders that will make the difference. The key, he said, was to achieve consistently good teaching across schools, to develop great middle leaders, prepare great headteachers, and to support individuals make the transition to be successful CEOs. Sir David also stressed the importance of the Key Progression Points for pupils, and getting these transitions right for all children. He recommended that leaders identify at least one school that leads on best practice for each across a MAT. Of the seven progression points Sir David emphasised entry to school, transition from year 6 to year 7, and into post-16 education.

Sir David briefly touched on the role of CEOs, saying that their role was to set the bar high, to define the standards expected, and to delegate well – recognising that a senior team needs space to perform and deliver. The role of the CEO is to delegate well, provide support where necessary and to ensure accountability of the senior team.

Sir David warned delegates that a structure is not enough to achieve successful schools. The structure has got to be conducive to enhancing standards and provide the basis for achieving better teaching, leadership and organizational. Not all MATs are strong, but, in his view, MATs are the best model for achieving and sustaining educational improvement.

Sir David highlighted the analysis recently undertaken (October 2016) by Ofsted into the eight characteristics of effective multi-academy trusts. Namely:

- **an ability to recruit and retain powerful and authoritative executive leaders, with a clear vision for bringing about higher standards**
- **a well-planned, broad and balanced curriculum that equips pupils with a strong command of the basics of English and mathematics, as well as the confidence, ambition and team-work skills to succeed in later life**
- **a commitment to provide a high-quality education for all pupils, in a calm and scholarly atmosphere**
- **investment in professional development of teachers and the sharing of knowledge and expertise across a strong network of constituent schools**
- **a high priority given to initial teacher training and leadership development to secure a pipeline of future talent**
- **clear frameworks of governance, accountability and delegation**
- **effective use of assessment information to identify, escalate and tackle problems quickly**
- **a cautious and considered approach to expansion**

The analysis added that “It is no surprise that for all these trusts, the key to success is the influential part being played by determined executive leaders, who are entrusted and empowered to make the right decisions to secure improvements.” The full summary can be accessed here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/hmcis-monthly-commentary-october-2016>

In terms of the future, Sir David explained that, from next year, ‘health checks’ would be introduced with the primary objective of supporting and informing the development of multi-academy trusts (whilst also providing a degree of challenge and accountability). The audits would

not be published as they are primarily intended to inform future improvement and help MATs to develop their capacity, rather than as a performance measure. That said, performance tables of multi-academy trusts will be introduced, as envisaged in the White Paper of March 2016.

Finally, Sir David referred to a new £140 million 'Strategic School Improvement Fund' for academies and maintained schools aimed at ensuring resources are targeted at the schools most in need of support to drive up standards, use their resources most effectively and deliver more good school places. The full announcement can be accessed here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-funding-for-school-improvement--2>

## **Summary plenary**

Kyra colleagues can together to reflect on the day and to consider the potential next steps for their schools, their local collaborations and for Kyra.

There was a strong believe that schools should now work together to explore the potential options. Many felt that that this would require a degree of facilitation and support – with some support from Kyra – to help them determine the direction they were heading in. There was also a view that Kyra could provide some initial brokerage for these conversations – bringing schools in similar circumstances and with similar ambitions together to explore how they could potentially work in partnership. There was a deep sense that doing nothing at all was not an option, and that exploring options and making an informed choice about the future direction of schools was necessary.

With specific regard to establishing and/or joining MATs, colleagues felt that it would be useful for Kyra to provide a toolkit to support schools and school groups through the process of academy conversion and beyond that through MAT development. There was also a view that Kyra should support schools to lobby government on the funding challenges they face, and also to help schools work together with key organisations such as Dicoese and Local Authority in navigating some of the 'stumbling blocks' to developing academy trust partnerships.

In summary, the key outcomes were:

- Schools should begin to plan now, deciding what they wish to achieve over the next three to five years (in the context of current change and challenges) and exploring which models may serve them best. Schools should set clear timescales for making any changes they feel necessary;
- Schools should work together (with some brokerage by Kyra) to discuss potential synergy in their visions and plans for the future, with a view to exploring formal groupings which may lead to academy status;
- Kyra should provide a toolkit, including guidance on the steps to becoming/joining a multi-academy trust, case studies of successful MAT models, examples of alternative models, and a digest of relevant research and guidance;
- Kyra should support schools – including small schools and Church schools - by engaging with key agencies (DfE, RSC, Diocese etc.) on the challenges they face in relation to formal partnership working and transition to academy status;
- Kyra should explore how it can support schools to ‘behave like MATs’ as they plans for transition – not least through opportunities for joint procurement, recruitment and formally sharing resources.
- Kyra should explore creating a mentoring scheme so that heads, business managers and governors can easily access the experience and knowledge of those that have been through the change process – including conversion to academy status or joining a multi-academy trust.

## **Final reflection**

The day ended with a strong sense within the room that it is now time to step up and to lead our schools and the system in Lincolnshire into the next phase of its development. Sitting back and waiting for change to come to us is no longer an option. We must shape the future that we wish to create – even if that means making some difficult choices in the coming months. Ultimately, those choices will involve committing ourselves as individual leaders, but also as groups of leaders and schools, to the path that we feel serves the best interests of our schools and our children and young people. As leaders it is down to us, and us alone, to do this.

Marie-Claire closed with the following poem:

***Let us be those leaders  
Who beat the drums that bring the people  
And sing songs that ache with purpose, passion and possibility  
And inspire the next generation to build boats that will carry  
them into the future  
Navigating wisely, with courage, unity, spirit, purpose, strength  
of self, with open hearts  
With the long view  
With the spirit of enquiry  
Let us stand in power with awareness and humility  
So the land holds  
And the people prosper***

***- Louise Marre, Leadership New Zealand Forum 2014***