



Department  
for Education

# **The case for a fully trust-led system**

**March 2022**



# The case for a fully trust led system

This annex is in two parts. The first sets out data on the school system, where possible by governance (i.e., multi academy trust, single academy trust, local authority maintained school); educational phase (i.e., primary, secondary, special, and alternative provision) and geography. The second sets out the impact of strong multi academy trusts.

## Data on the school system

### Changes in the school system since 2010

The school system has undergone significant change over the last decade. In January 2010, there were just 203 academies with fewer than 200,000 pupils.<sup>1</sup> All were secondary schools and created under the sponsored academies programme which matched underperforming schools with sponsors in order to support rapid improvement.

Following the landmark 2010 reforms, the number of academies began to grow. In 2011 the number of academies doubled to 408 in total with nearly 400,000 pupils.<sup>2</sup> In January 2021, over 4.5m pupils were educated in nearly 10,000 academies – over a third of state funded primaries and over three quarters of secondary schools.<sup>3</sup> Of these 2,465 were sponsored academies, schools that had previously been underperforming and 6,320 were converter academies, usually Good or Outstanding before they converted. This growth reflected both the need for school improvement support, the value of working in a family of schools and the desire of many school leaders to have more autonomy over decisions in their schools.

Many Good and Outstanding schools converted as single academy trusts (SATs), and some remain. Where schools underperformed, they were increasingly transferred into multi academy trusts (MATs) as sponsored academies and those trusts have a good record of improving such schools. Robust analysis comparing annual cohorts of sponsored academies with similar local authority maintained schools shows that, on average, sponsored schools improve more quickly. Before they joined a trust, they performed significantly less well than otherwise similar schools. However, after joining a trust, the majority of sponsored academies demonstrate improvement, and their performance matches or exceeds these comparator schools<sup>4</sup>. More than 7 out of 10 sponsored academies which were found to be underperforming as an LA maintained school in their previous inspection now have a good or outstanding rating<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> DfE. [Schools, pupils and their characteristics](#). 2010.

<sup>2</sup> DfE. [Schools, pupils and their characteristics](#). 2011.

<sup>3</sup> DfE. [Schools, pupils and their characteristics](#). 2021.

<sup>4</sup> DfE. [An analysis of the performance of sponsored academies](#). 2019.

<sup>5</sup> DfE. [Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child](#) - [See Sponsored Academy Ofsted sheet in 'The case for a fully trust-led system – data tables and methodology']

## Growth of trusts

Whilst the number of academies has increased significantly, this change has not been uniform, with 80% of secondary schools now academies, but only 39% of primaries.<sup>6</sup> The majority of the remaining schools in the local authority (LA) maintained sector are primary schools (10,615 out of 11,362 in January 2021), of which 40% have a faith designation.<sup>7</sup>

The tables below show how the school system has changed since the middle of the last decade. From 2015 to 2021, the number of state-funded primary schools in MATs has increased by 24 percentage points (pp), 33 pp for secondary, and 27 pp for special and alternative provision (AP). Over this period, the number of LA maintained schools has decreased by 23 pp at primary, 17 pp at secondary, and 26 pp for special and AP. The number of schools in SATs has also decreased, by 2 pp at primary, 16 pp at secondary, and 2 pp for special and AP.

When comparing groups of LA maintained schools, MATs and SATs caution should be exercised as these cohorts of schools are both constituted differently and are directly interdependent. MATs are groups of schools, which can include sponsored academies, converter academies and free schools in different configurations and sizes. SATs are standalone schools, the vast majority of which converted as Good or Outstanding secondary schools. This has meant that MATs have largely taken on the challenge of underperformance. LA maintained schools represent the group of schools that have not become academies and are now more likely to be primary phase (85% of LA schools are primary schools) and will generally contain larger groups of schools than most MATs. Whilst exercising caution, it is still useful to present data on all three groups to illustrate how the school system has changed.

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<sup>6</sup> DfE. [Open academies, free schools, studio schools and UTCs](#). March 2022.

<sup>7</sup> DfE. [Schools, pupils and their characteristics](#). 2021. and [Get Information about Schools](#). 2021.

2015<sup>8</sup>

	Governance	Primary			Secondary			Special & Alternative Provision			Total no. of schools	Total no. of pupils
		Primary schools	% of primary schools	Primary pupils	Secondary schools	% of secondary schools	Secondary pupils	Special & AP schools	% of special & AP schools	Special & AP pupils		
All schools (state-funded)	LA maintained	14,374	86%	3,792,193	1,315	39%	1,201,160	1132	85%	96,261	16,821	5,089,614
	MAT	1,619	10%	469,536	889	26%	814,014	114	9%	9,464	2,622	1,293,014
	SAT	773	5%	248,579	1,177	35%	1,169,554	87	7%	9,107	2,037	1,427,240
Of which faith schools	LA maintained	5,495	89%	1,135,266	312	49%	272,974	n/a	n/a	n/a	5807	1,408,240
	MAT	461	7%	101,775	140	22%	128,950	n/a	n/a	n/a	601	230,725
	SAT	249	4%	62,470	187	29%	188,296	n/a	n/a	n/a	436	250,766

Table 1: State-funded schools, split by faith status, governance and phase, 2015<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Single and multi academy trusts were not meaningful concepts in common use for which schools' data can be reliably provided before 2015. The 408 academies in 2011 had sponsors with some similar functions to trusts today.

<sup>9</sup> DfE. [Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child](#) - [See 'The case for a fully trust-led system – data tables and methodology']

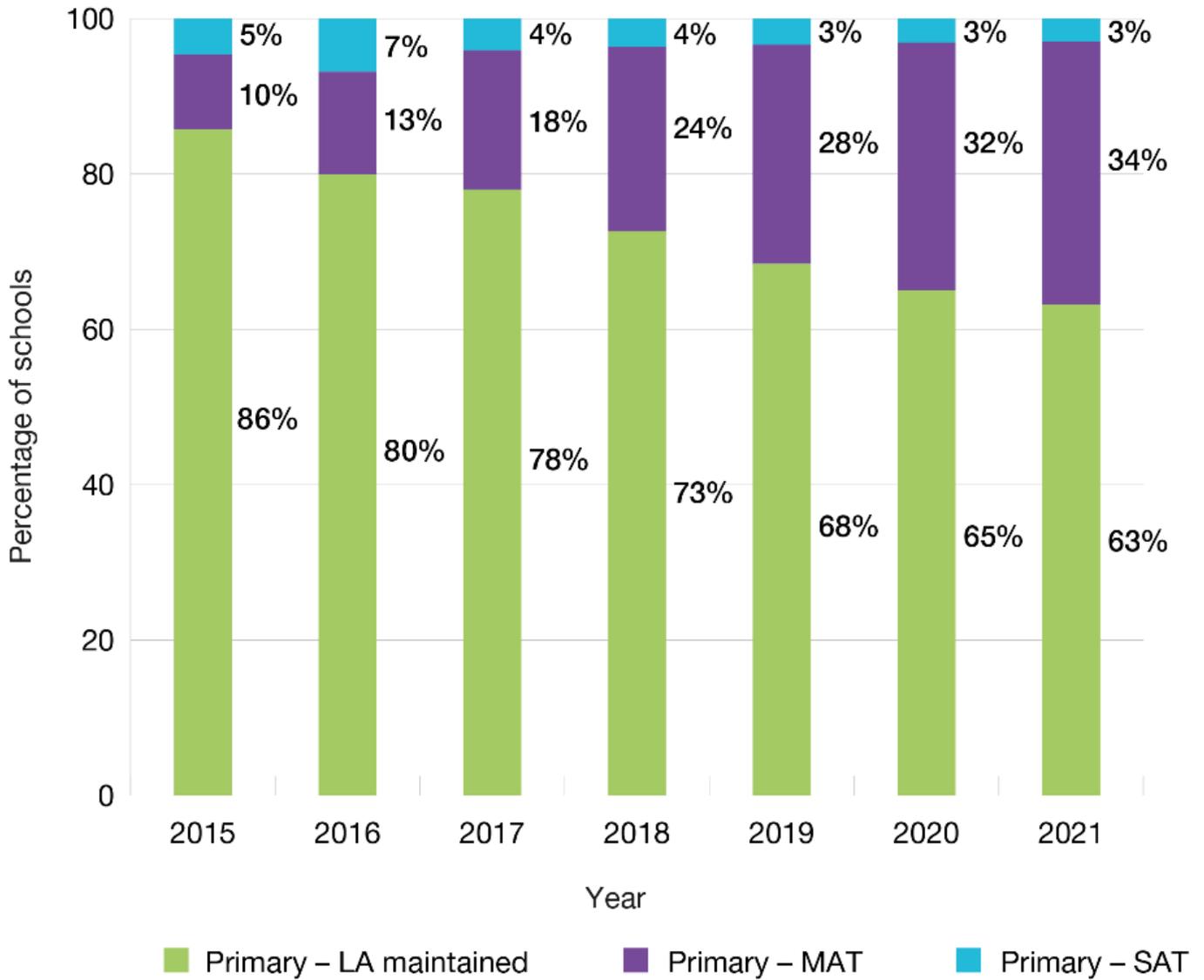
2021

	Governance	Primary			Secondary			Special & Alternative Provision			Total no. of schools	Total no. of pupils
		Primary schools	% of primary schools	Primary pupils	Secondary schools	% of secondary schools	Secondary pupils	Special & AP schools	% of special & AP schools	Special & AP pupils		
All schools (state-funded)	LA maintained	10,615	63%	2,856,650	747	22%	762,461	796	59%	89,756	12,158	3,708,867
	MAT	5,675	34%	1,636,917	2050	59%	2,034,518	492	36%	50,030	8,217	3,721,465
	SAT	501	3%	166,597	661	19%	696,528	65	5%	7,175	1,227	870,400
Of which faith schools	LA maintained	4,215	68%	881,382	218	35%	211,546	n/a	n/a	n/a	4,433	1,092,928
	MAT	1,777	29%	389,828	293	47%	291,815	n/a	n/a	n/a	2,070	681,643
	SAT	192	3%	53,608	117	19%	125,549	n/a	n/a	n/a	309	177,371

Table 2: State-funded schools, split by faith status, governance and phase, 2021<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> DfE. [Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child](#) - [See 'The case for a fully trust-led system – data tables and methodology']

## Percentage of primary schools that are LA maintained, in SATs or in MATs, 2015-2021



**Chart 1: Primary - % of schools that are LA maintained, in SATs or MATs, 2015-2021<sup>11</sup>**

<sup>11</sup> School numbers taken from DfE. [Schools, pupils and their characteristics](#), January 2015- January 2021 (school level underlying data), matched to trust status information from [Get Information about Schools archive](#), accessed January 2015- January 2021

## Percentage of secondary schools that are LA maintained, in SATs or in MATs, 2015-2021

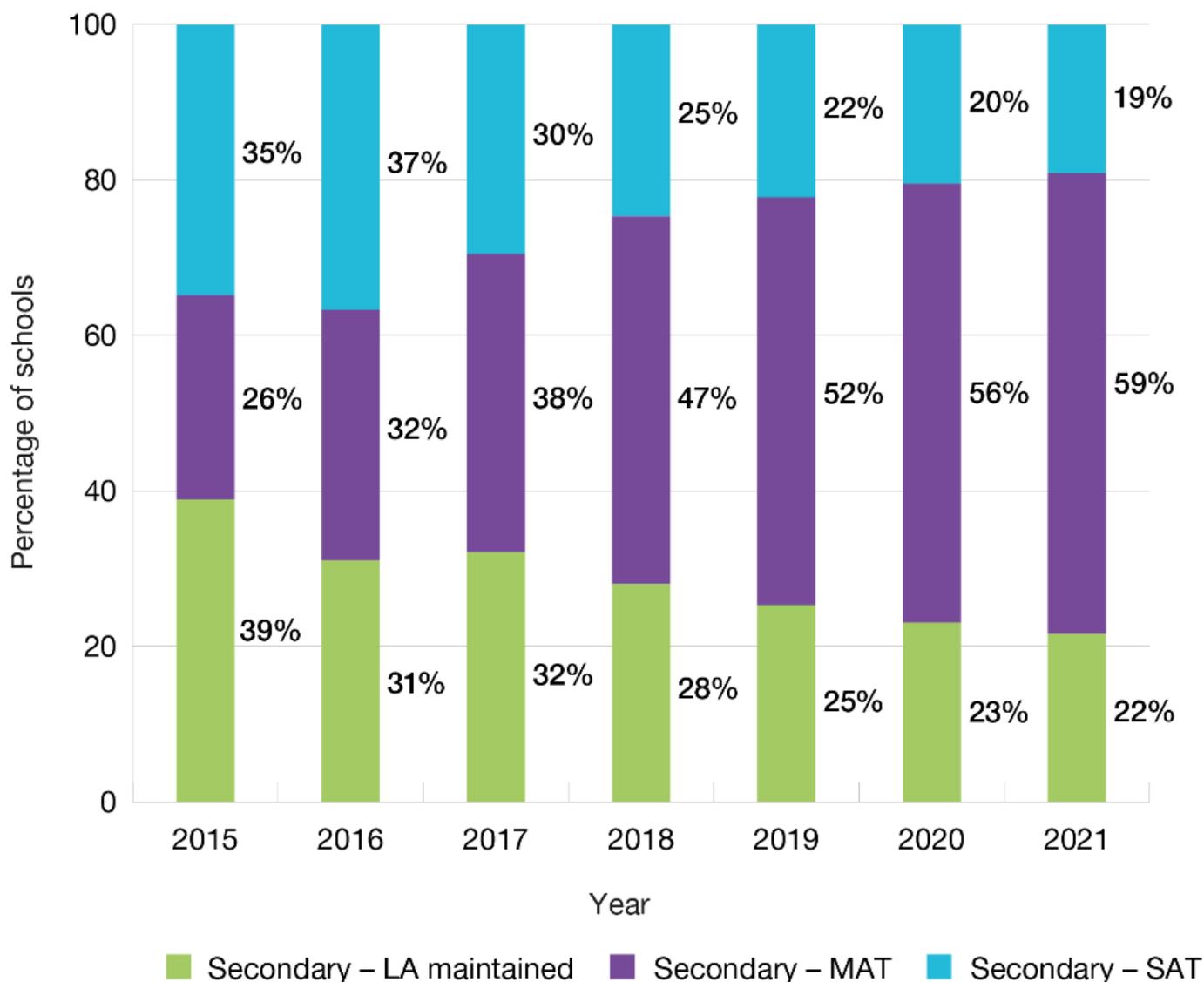


Chart 2: Secondary - % of schools that are LA maintained, in SATs or MATs, 2015-2021<sup>12</sup>

### Geographical analysis

There is significant regional variation in the proportion of children educated in local authority maintained schools, multi academy trusts, and single academy trusts, at both primary and secondary phases.

In some areas of the country, a large proportion of schools are in MATs – predominantly at secondary phase. Elsewhere the proportion is much smaller.

<sup>12</sup> School numbers from DfE. [Schools, pupils and their characteristics](#), January 2015- January 2021 (school level underlying data), matched to trust status information from [Get Information about Schools archive](#), accessed January 2015- January 2021

In the North West just 23% of schools are in MATs, compared with 52% in the South West.

Broken down by phase in the tables below we see that the variation remains:

- **Secondary** – East of England (70%) versus North West (50%)
- **Primary** – South West (50%) versus North West (18%)
- **Special and AP** – East Midlands (56%) versus North West (23%)

Secondary academies are much more likely to be a SAT than primaries – a quarter of secondary academies compared to under a tenth at primary phase. Again, there are substantial regional differences – for example, 6% of secondary schools are SATs in the North East compared to 23% in the South West.

### Percentage of schools in MATs per region

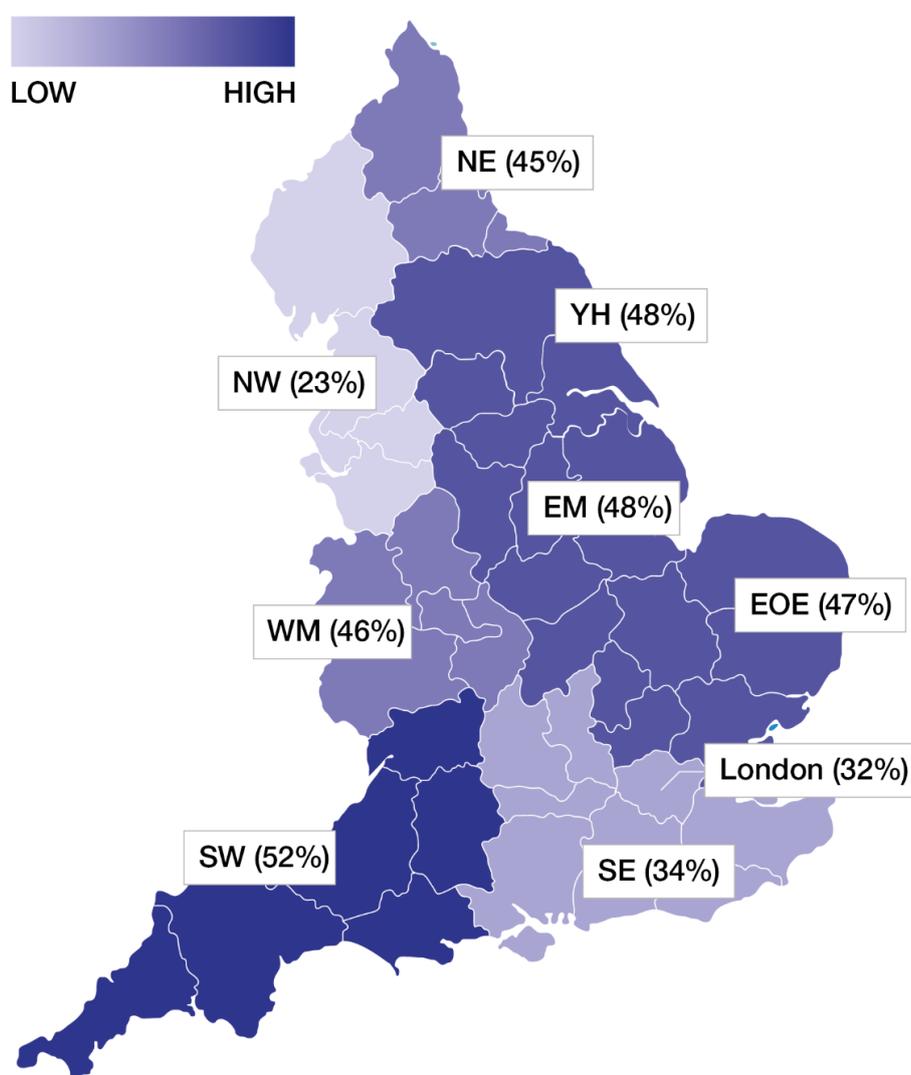


Fig 1: The map shows the overall percentage of schools in MATs per region in 2022 (covering primary, secondary, special and AP)<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> [Get Information about Schools](#) as at 7 March 2022

Whilst there are regional differences, from 2015 to 2021, we have seen a general increase in the percentage of pupils educated in MATs across all regions.

Primary schools – percentage of pupils in MATs, 2015-2021

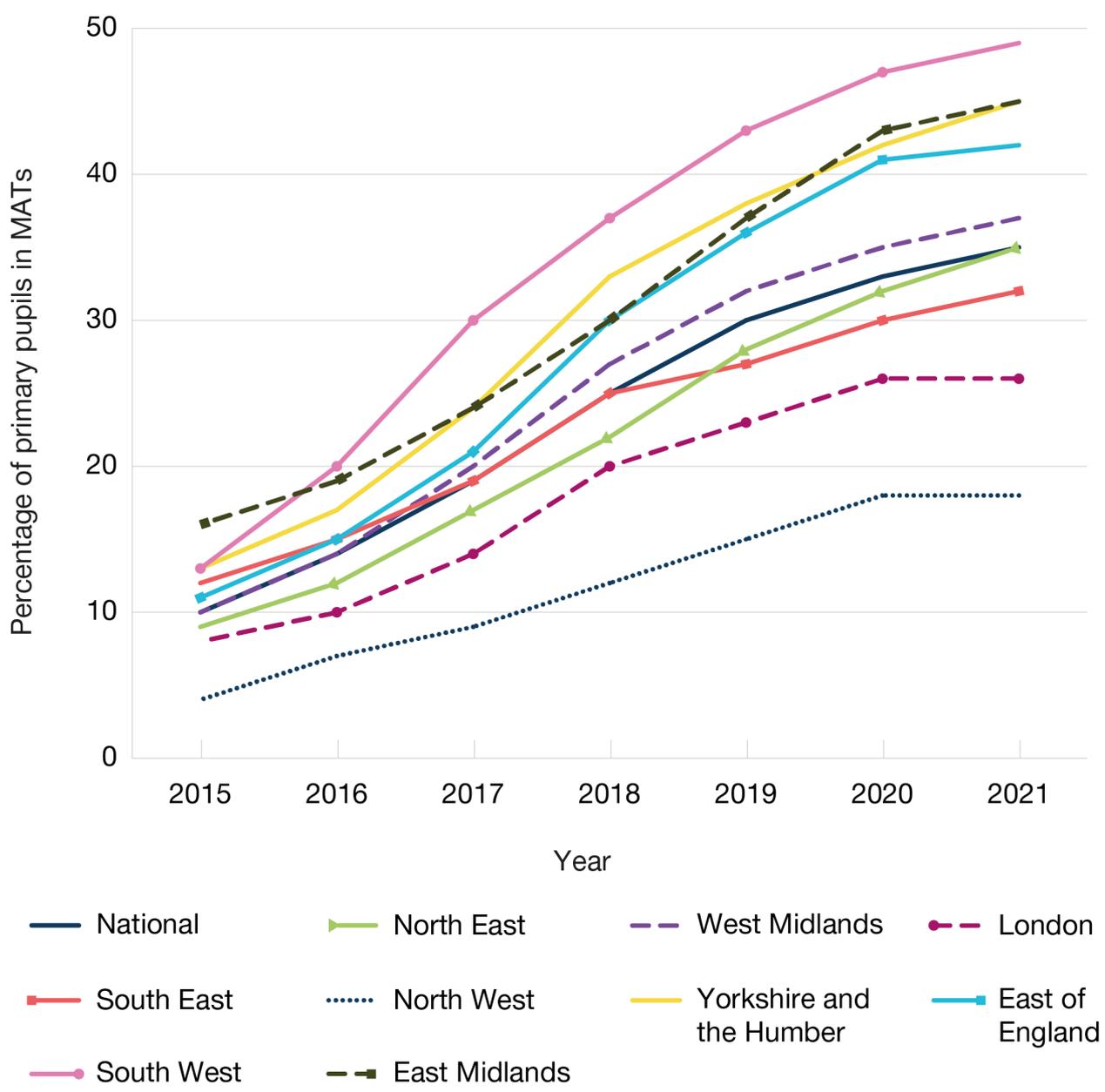


Chart 3: Primary schools - % of pupils in MATs by region, 2015 – 2021<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Pupil numbers taken from DfE. [Schools, pupils and their characteristics](#). January 2015- January 2021 (school level underlying data) matched to trust status information from [Get Information about Schools archive](#), accessed January 2015-January 2021

## Secondary schools – percentage of pupils in MATs, 2015-2021

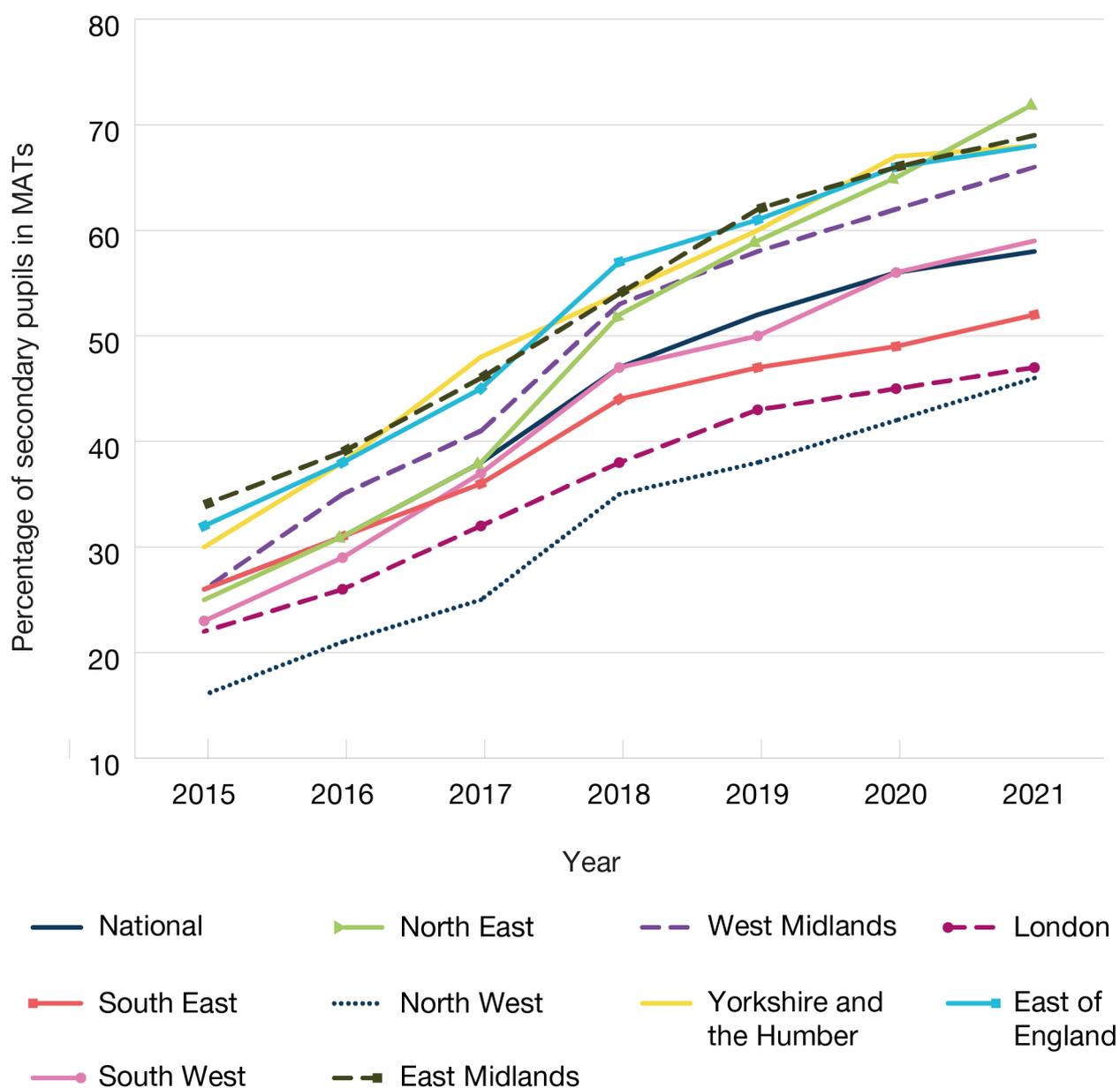


Chart 4: Secondary schools - % of pupils in MATs by region, 2015 – 2021<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Pupil numbers taken from DfE. [Schools, pupils and their characteristics](#), DfE, January 2015- January 2021 (school level underlying data), matched to trust status information from [Get Information about Schools archive](#), accessed January 2015- January 2021

	Primary			Secondary			Special & Alternative Provision		
	Number of schools	Number of pupils	% of schools	Number of schools	Number of pupils	% of schools	Number of schools	Number of pupils	% of schools
<b>National</b>	<b>16,785</b>	<b>4,573,633</b>		<b>3,406</b>	<b>3,422,302</b>		<b>1,361</b>	<b>144,836</b>	
LAM	10,267	2,771,955	61.2%	696	716,402	20.4%	766	87,687	56.3%
MAT	6,041	1,642,809	36.0%	2,106	2,048,708	61.8%	531	50,513	39.0%
SAT	477	158,869	2.8%	604	657,192	17.7%	64	6,636	4.7%
<b>East Midlands</b>	<b>1,648</b>	<b>394,573</b>		<b>290</b>	<b>293,424</b>		<b>106</b>	<b>10,836</b>	
LAM	866	190,847	52.5%	29	29,843	10.0%	37	3,928	34.9%
MAT	712	182,494	43.2%	210	208,911	72.4%	59	5,457	55.7%
SAT	70	21,232	4.2%	51	54,670	17.6%	10	1,451	9.4%
<b>East of England</b>	<b>1,990</b>	<b>513,185</b>		<b>390</b>	<b>395,606</b>		<b>144</b>	<b>14,831</b>	
LAM	1,085	269,390	54.5%	34	34,242	8.7%	59	6,801	41.0%
MAT	845	220,988	42.5%	273	269,122	70.0%	73	6,721	50.7%
SAT	60	22,807	3.0%	83	92,242	21.3%	12	1,309	8.3%
<b>London</b>	<b>1,799</b>	<b>710,548</b>		<b>503</b>	<b>549,485</b>		<b>213</b>	<b>21,147</b>	
LAM	1,275	502,604	70.9%	141	164,297	28.0%	126	13,341	59.2%
MAT	475	189,560	26.4%	255	264,247	50.7%	75	7,114	35.2%
SAT	49	18,384	2.7%	107	120,941	21.3%	12	692	5.6%
<b>North East</b>	<b>863</b>	<b>206,807</b>		<b>173</b>	<b>157,698</b>		<b>78</b>	<b>8,874</b>	
LAM	495	122,692	57.4%	40	30,193	23.1%	45	5,496	57.7%
MAT	349	78,114	40.4%	122	115,450	70.5%	30	3,002	38.5%
SAT	19	6,001	2.2%	11	12,055	6.4%	3	376	3.8%
<b>North West</b>	<b>2,447</b>	<b>644,007</b>		<b>463</b>	<b>435,001</b>		<b>211</b>	<b>22,469</b>	
LAM	1,975	509,852	80.7%	156	152,300	33.7%	159	16,790	75.4%
MAT	429	120,536	17.5%	233	207,137	50.3%	48	5,369	22.7%
SAT	43	13,619	1.8%	74	75,564	16.0%	4	310	1.9%

	Primary			Secondary			Special & Alternative Provision		
	Number of schools	Number of pupils	% of schools	Number of schools	Number of pupils	% of schools	Number of schools	Number of pupils	% of schools
<b>South East</b>	<b>2,604</b>	<b>718,304</b>		<b>509</b>	<b>545,021</b>		<b>207</b>	<b>23,639</b>	
LAM	1,759	463,251	67.5%	135	148,709	26.5%	130	16,152	62.8%
MAT	787	233,350	30.2%	278	285,318	54.6%	69	6,429	33.3%
SAT	58	21,703	2.2%	96	110,994	18.9%	8	1,058	3.9%
<b>South West</b>	<b>1,888</b>	<b>412,951</b>		<b>340</b>	<b>326,216</b>		<b>122</b>	<b>11,827</b>	
LAM	869	182,333	46.0%	44	42,563	12.9%	58	6,493	47.5%
MAT	946	208,089	50.1%	219	199,693	64.4%	59	4,670	48.4%
SAT	73	22,529	3.9%	77	83,960	22.6%	5	664	4.1%
<b>West Midlands</b>	<b>1,772</b>	<b>502,198</b>		<b>416</b>	<b>386,779</b>		<b>166</b>	<b>18,683</b>	
LAM	993	289,962	56.0%	58	50,477	13.9%	92	10,953	55.4%
MAT	726	193,934	41.0%	287	267,438	69.0%	67	7,292	40.4%
SAT	53	18,302	3.0%	71	68,864	17.1%	7	438	4.2%
<b>Yorkshire and the Humber</b>	<b>1,774</b>	<b>471,060</b>		<b>322</b>	<b>333,072</b>		<b>114</b>	<b>12,530</b>	
LAM	950	241,024	53.6%	59	63,778	18.3%	60	7,733	52.6%
MAT	772	215,744	43.5%	229	231,392	71.1%	51	4,459	44.7%
SAT	52	14,292	2.9%	34	37,902	10.6%	3	338	2.6%

Table 3: Schools and pupils in LA maintained schools, SATs and MATs, by phase and region – 2022<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> DfE. [Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child](#) - [See 'The case for a fully trust-led system – data tables and methodology']

## Trust size

The average trust is over 8 years old and 75% of trusts have less than 5 schools, with 53% running a single school. Less than 1% of trusts have more than 30 schools. However, we are continuing to see the system consolidate, with 88% of academies in MATs compared with 81% three years ago. 64% of academies and 56% of pupils are in MATs of 6 or more academies.

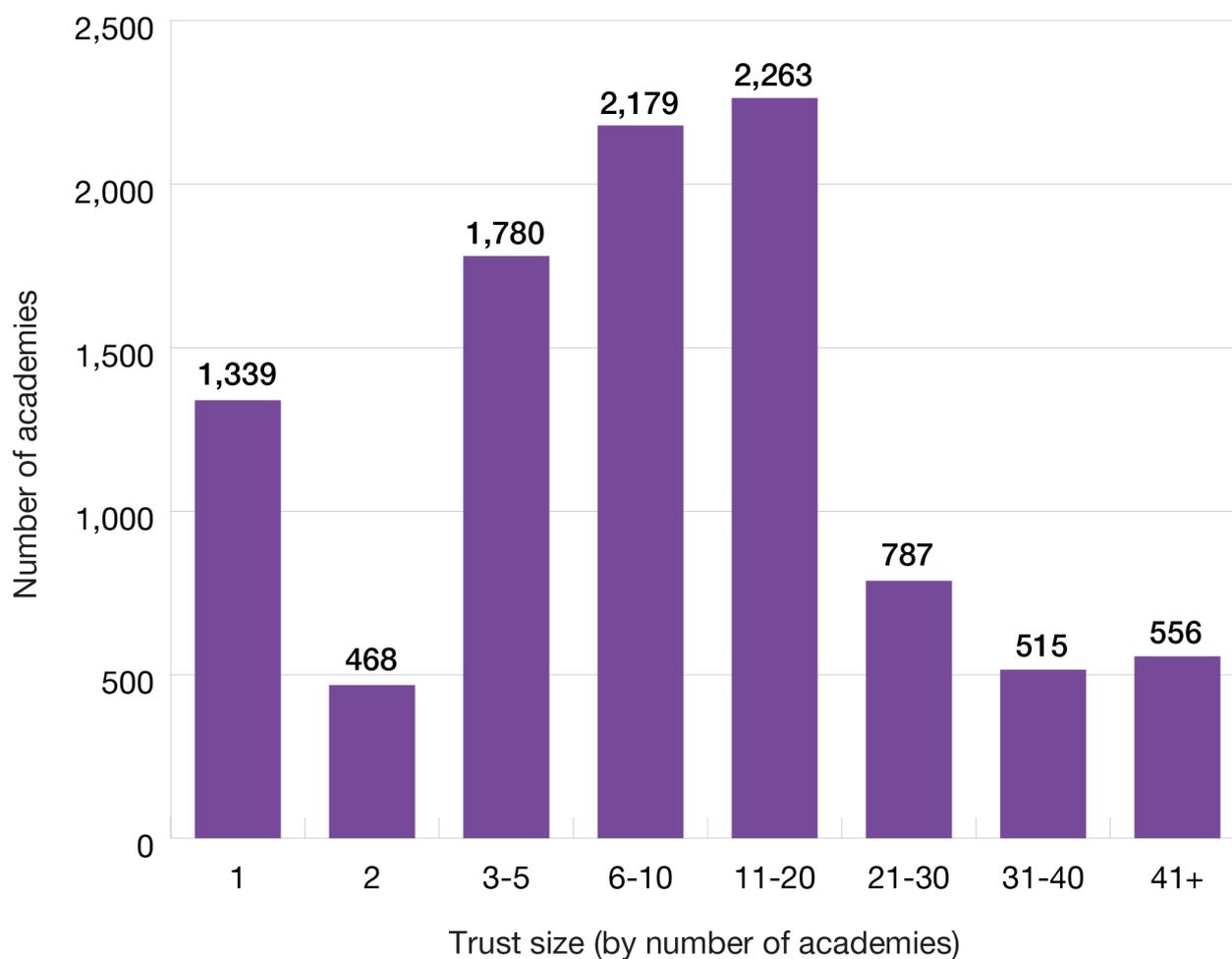
MAT size	Primary (including middle-deemed <sup>17</sup> primary)		Secondary (including middle-deemed secondary, all-through and 16-19)		Special & AP	
	No. of schools	No. of pupils	No. of schools	No. of pupils	No. of schools	No. of pupils
Standalone academies	552	187,200	702	750,500	85	9,000
2 - 5 schools	1,365	440,100	657	656,500	226	24,100
6 - 10 schools	1,562	457,500	505	500,900	112	10,300
11 - 20 schools	1,726	442,700	429	404,400	108	9,900
21+ schools	1,313	355,400	481	459,200	64	6,300
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,518</b>	<b>1,882,800</b>	<b>2,774</b>	<b>2,771,500</b>	<b>595</b>	<b>59,500</b>

Table 4: Trust size groupings with school and pupil totals<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Middle-deemed primary/secondary schools are middle schools whose years mainly cover either primary or secondary phases

<sup>18</sup> DfE. [Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child](#) - [See 'The case for a fully trust-led system – data tables and methodology']

## Number of academies in different size trusts



**Chart 5: Number of academies in different size trusts<sup>19</sup>**

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<sup>19</sup> Aggregated from [Get Information about Schools](#), accessed 1 March 2022

## Trust size

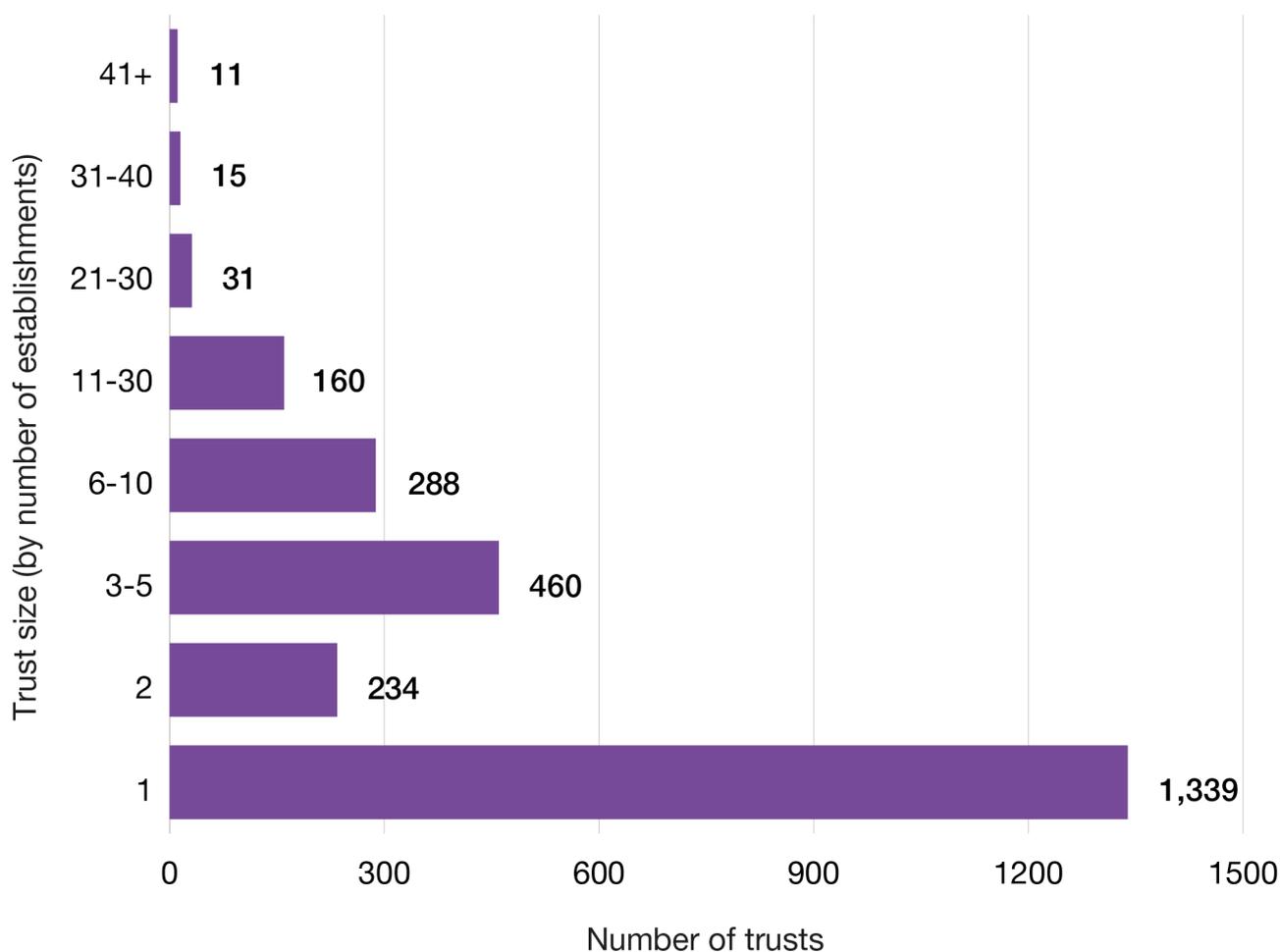


Chart 6: Number of trusts in different sizes<sup>20</sup>

## School performance

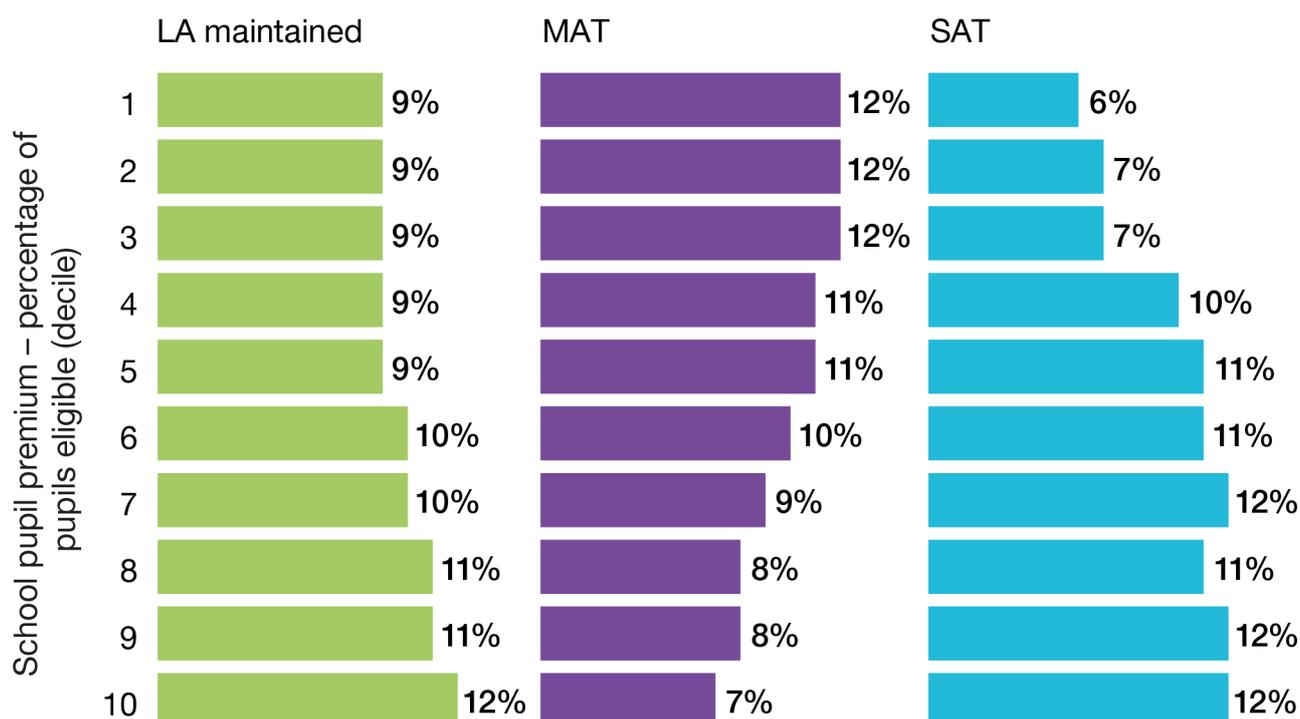
Multi academy trusts have largely taken on the challenge of underperformance. Sponsored academies generally replaced under-performing local authority schools, many with a history of low attainment, and they are usually supported within MATs. MATs therefore have many more schools which have historically faced challenges. As underperforming LA maintained schools have joined MATs, remaining LA maintained schools are more likely to be judged Good or Outstanding by Ofsted. Many schools converted into single academy trusts as higher performing Good and Outstanding schools and have largely remained so.

Sponsored academies are also more likely to have a higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils. Many schools in MATs therefore have a higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils than LA maintained schools and SATs, illustrated using a school-based metric below (percentage of pupils eligible for pupil premium decile).

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<sup>20</sup> Aggregated from [Get Information about Schools archive](#), accessed 1 March 2022

## Percentage of pupils eligible for pupil premium



Note: 1 (most eligible for pupil premium), 10 (least eligible for pupil premium)

**Chart 7: Proportion of schools in each pupil premium decile by governance status, 2021<sup>21</sup>**

Schools that have become sponsored academies in MATs typically received an Ofsted judgement below Good at their last inspection before conversion. Since 2016, the Secretary of State has been required by law to convert schools in receipt of an Inadequate judgement into academies. Although most of these schools improve by at least one grade at their first inspection after joining a trust, the school improvement role that MATs have taken on means they have a higher proportion of schools judged below Good by Ofsted or not yet rated (where a school has not been inspected since it opened). A number of free schools have not yet been inspected since opening. However, of those that have been inspected, 86%<sup>22</sup> are Good or Outstanding.

<sup>21</sup> School level pupil premium data from DfE. [Pupil premium: allocations and conditions of grant 2021 to 2022](#) Matched to School type from [Get Information about Schools \[SAT and MAT membership history\]](#), as at 31 October 2021.

<sup>22</sup> This includes 16-19 free schools inspected under the further education and skills inspection handbook, and it includes ratings of predecessor URNs

State-funded primary schools	Number of schools					Number of pupils				
	Outstanding	Good	Requires Improvement	Inadequate	Not Rated	Outstanding	Good	Requires Improvement	Inadequate	Not Rated
<b>Multi academy trust</b>	<b>921 (15%)</b>	<b>3850 (64%)</b>	<b>700 (12%)</b>	<b>420 (7%)</b>	<b>126 (2%)</b>	<b>303,767</b>	<b>1,103,784</b>	<b>190,629</b>	<b>105,605</b>	<b>17,780</b>
Academy converter	788 (19%)	2940 (70%)	411 (10%)	36 (1%)	14 (0%)	253,405	827,171	109,762	9,332	4,065
Academy sponsor led	90 (6%)	858 (53%)	284 (18%)	381 (23%)	9 (1%)	35,046	260,475	79,433	95,676	3,035
Free schools	43 (21%)	52 (25%)	5 (2%)	3 (1%)	103 (50%)	15,316	16,138	1,434	597	10,680
<b>Single-academy trust</b>	<b>131 (27%)</b>	<b>322 (67%)</b>	<b>22 (5%)</b>	<b>3 (1%)</b>	<b>1 (0%)</b>	<b>43,552</b>	<b>110,000</b>	<b>5,907</b>	<b>499</b>	<b>55</b>
Academy converter	123 (28%)	295 (67%)	19 (4%)	3 (1%)	0 (0%)	41,182	103,087	5,139	499	0
Academy sponsor led	0 (0%)	5 (83%)	1 (17%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0	1,135	319	0	0
Free schools	8 (24%)	22 (67%)	2 (6%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	2,370	5,778	449	0	55
<b>LA maintained</b>	<b>1626 (16%)</b>	<b>7841 (76%)</b>	<b>776 (8%)</b>	<b>34 (0%)</b>	<b>15 (0%)</b>	<b>485,857</b>	<b>2,079,696</b>	<b>201,948</b>	<b>6,591</b>	<b>5,165</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>2678 (16%)</b>	<b>12013 (72%)</b>	<b>1498 (9%)</b>	<b>457 (3%)</b>	<b>142 (1%)</b>	<b>833,176</b>	<b>3,293,480</b>	<b>398,484</b>	<b>112,695</b>	<b>23,000</b>

Table 5: Ofsted by school status, state-funded primary schools, 2022<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> DfE. [Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child](#) - [See 'The case for a fully trust-led system – data tables and methodology']

State-funded secondary schools	Number of schools					Number of pupils				
	Outstanding	Good	Requires Improvement	Inadequate	Not Rated	Outstanding	Good	Requires Improvement	Inadequate	Not Rated
<b>MAT</b>	<b>375 (18%)</b>	<b>1085 (52%)</b>	<b>356 (17%)</b>	<b>197 (9%)</b>	<b>90 (4%)</b>	<b>480,547</b>	<b>1,097,736</b>	<b>319,210</b>	<b>171,676</b>	<b>29,404</b>
Academy converter	284 (25%)	651 (57%)	161 (14%)	38 (3%)	2 (0%)	384,543	708,318	154,938	35,846	740
Academy sponsor led	60 (8%)	353 (48%)	170 (23%)	147 (20%)	3 (0%)	70,840	341,683	154,855	130,791	1,625
Free Schools	30 (16%)	51 (28%)	13 (7%)	9 (5%)	80 (44%)	24,667	38,277	7,093	4,426	25,786
UTCs	0 (0%)	15 (79%)	2 (11%)	0 (0%)	2 (11%)	0	3,802	263	0	540
Studio Schools	1 (3%)	15 (47%)	10 (31%)	3 (9%)	3 (9%)	497	5,656	2,061	613	713
<b>SAT</b>	<b>172 (28%)</b>	<b>368 (61%)</b>	<b>53 (9%)</b>	<b>7 (1%)</b>	<b>4 (1%)</b>	<b>203,249</b>	<b>397,271</b>	<b>50,828</b>	<b>4,276</b>	<b>1,568</b>
Academy converter	159 (32%)	304 (60%)	38 (8%)	3 (1%)	0 (0%)	191,855	343,504	40,848	1,806	0
Academy sponsor led	5 (11%)	33 (70%)	8 (17%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	6,382	35,455	7,054	381	0
Free Schools	5 (14%)	23 (66%)	1 (3%)	3 (9%)	3 (9%)	3,685	15,594	599	2,089	1,414
UTCs	0 (0%)	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0	360	78	0	0
Studio Schools	3 (19%)	7 (44%)	5 (31%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	1,327	2,358	2,249	0	154
<b>LA maintained</b>	<b>115 (16%)</b>	<b>478 (68%)</b>	<b>97 (14%)</b>	<b>12 (2%)</b>	<b>0 (0%)</b>	<b>139,335</b>	<b>483,335</b>	<b>89,096</b>	<b>11,802</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>All schools</b>	<b>662 (19%)</b>	<b>1931 (57%)</b>	<b>506 (15%)</b>	<b>216 (6%)</b>	<b>94 (3%)</b>	<b>823,131</b>	<b>1,978,342</b>	<b>459,134</b>	<b>187,754</b>	<b>30,972</b>

Table 6: Ofsted by school status, state-funded secondary schools, 2022<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> DfE. [Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child](#) - [See 'The case for a fully trust-led system – data tables and methodology']

## The impact of strong multi academy trusts

The last 10 years of reform means we now know more than we did about how structures and systems can help drive better outcomes – we've sought views widely, seeking feedback, input, and evidence across the whole system including schools, trusts and local authorities, and looking at how we can harness and grow effective practice in a single school system in which schools collaborate in the interests of all children.

There are different models of collaboration in the system, and we recognise that both local authority maintained schools and trusts vary in terms of performance. But it is families of schools working together in the single governance and accountability structure of a multi academy trust who can most effectively share good practice, support their schools to improve, and provide opportunities for staff.

We know our strongest trusts achieve consistently strong outcomes for their children and have been able to support teachers and schools where the challenge is greatest. Our priority is to grow *strong trusts* and extend their reach, so that all schools can benefit from the support they can provide, and improve outcomes for all children.

Our case for change identifies what strong trusts can deliver, including: a high quality and inclusive education; sustainable school improvement; excellent support for teachers and teaching, strategic leadership and governance; and effective financial management.

### High quality and inclusive education

The performance of LA maintained schools, SATs and MATs varies, with the latter incorporating sponsored academies. These schools typically suffered from low attainment as under-performing local authority schools and often have a higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils. Single academy trusts converted as Good and Outstanding schools and thus were more likely to be high performing.

Despite this, the best MATs transform outcomes for pupils, particularly the most disadvantaged, and deliver improvement in schools and areas where poor performance had become entrenched. If all pupils did as well in reading, writing and maths at key stage 2 in 2019 as pupils in the MAT performing at the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of MATs on this measure, national performance would have been 8 percentage points higher at 73%. At the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile this would have been 79%.

For disadvantaged pupils, the increases would have been even greater – 10 percentage points at the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of performance for pupil premium pupils at KS2 and 19 percentage points at the 90<sup>th</sup>. The strongest trusts are relentlessly focused on using their expertise and resources to cater to the needs of all pupils, especially disadvantaged children or children with SEND. MATs can pool resource and expertise<sup>25</sup> to benefit

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<sup>25</sup> Ofsted. [Multi academy trusts: benefits, challenges and functions](#). 2019.

children with SEND. They can ensure interventions are in place to improve outcomes and offer effective support and pastoral care to ensure no pupil is left behind.

	10th percentile	25th percentile	50th percentile	75th percentile	90th percentile
LA	62	65	67	70	73
MAT	52	58	65	73	79
SAT	49	60	71	80	87

**Table 7: Key stage 2: LA, MAT and SAT average percentage of pupils reaching expected standard in reading, writing and maths<sup>26</sup>**

	10th percentile	25th percentile	50th percentile	75th percentile	90th percentile
LA	45	48	52	58	65
MAT	34	43	51	61	70
SAT	27	40	53	69	80

**Table 8: Key stage 2: LA, MAT and SAT average percentage of pupils eligible for pupil premium reaching expected standard in reading, writing and maths<sup>27</sup>**

In secondary schools, we see a similar pattern. The top 10% of MATs outperform the highest performing LAs by 0.2 Progress 8 score. For disadvantaged pupils, the pattern is repeated, with a lower absolute but larger relative performance advantage.

	10th percentile	25th percentile	50th percentile	75th percentile	90th percentile
LA	-0.37	-0.21	-0.07	0.10	0.29
MAT	-0.49	-0.25	-0.01	0.25	0.49
SAT	-0.54	-0.22	0.05	0.41	0.70

**Table 9: Key stage 4: LA, MAT and SAT average Progress 8 score<sup>28</sup>**

	10th percentile	25th percentile	50th percentile	75th percentile	90th percentile
LA	-0.82	-0.64	-0.45	-0.22	0.08
MAT	-0.90	-0.67	-0.41	-0.11	0.24
SAT	-1.00	-0.71	-0.36	-0.02	0.4

**Table 10: Key stage 4: LA, MAT and SAT average Progress 8 score for pupils eligible for pupil premium<sup>29</sup>**

<sup>26</sup> DfE. [Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child](#) - [See 'The case for a fully trusted system – data tables and methodology']

<sup>27</sup> DfE. [Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child](#) - [See 'The case for a fully trusted system – data tables and methodology']

<sup>28</sup> DfE. [Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child](#) - [See 'The case for a fully trusted system – data tables and methodology']

<sup>29</sup> DfE. [Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child](#) - [See 'The case for a fully trusted system – data tables and methodology']

However, it is also true that, on average, the poorest performing MATs do worse than the poorest performing LAs, often where trusts have sponsored schools but been unable to drive sufficient improvement. It is vital therefore that, as this white paper sets out, we take a single regulatory approach to academy trusts and provide parents with assurance about the expectations against which trusts are held to account.

## School improvement

Our best multi academy trusts extend the impact of our strongest school leaders, to deliver sustainable school improvement. The internal structures of a trust effectively facilitate school improvement by allowing leaders to direct and implement priorities for improvement that are tailored towards the specific needs of each individual school, within the clear accountability structure of the MAT. Ofsted's recent report<sup>30</sup> found that the majority of 'unstuck' schools that were part of a trust considered the influence of the trust as intrinsic to their recent success, citing the trust's role in raising expectations; providing challenge where needed; developing curriculum subject expertise; and the scale and management of the trust.

**Strong trust leaders are relentlessly focused on improving outcomes.** This purpose is enshrined in an academy trust's Articles of Association, with advancement of education for the public good contracted through funding agreements between academy trusts and the DfE. Effective trusts ensure that this clear ethos is felt throughout the trust's schools, and that all staff are able to feel part of this trust-wide community of professionals focused on what is best for the children in their care.

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<sup>30</sup> Ofsted. [Fight or flight? How 'stuck' schools are overcoming isolation](#). 2020

## Case Study

### Transforming outcomes for disadvantaged children at the Harris Federation

The Harris Federation (a MAT with 51 academies) operates in significantly disadvantaged areas, with 38% of their pupils in receipt of free school meals – in some schools the figure is as high as 75%. The Federation's strategies for disadvantaged students in secondary place a high priority on closing the gap, including:

- Supporting and training senior teams to maintain a relentless focus on ensuring great teaching for all, with a particular focus on deep subject knowledge and fluency.
- A deliberate Federation-wide investment in high quality CPD for teachers, quality first teaching and a toolkit of strategies and skills.
- A strong and planned focus on literacy for all in lessons, particularly reading, comprehension and oracy.

Although two thirds of schools were underperforming prior to joining the trust, 78% are Outstanding at secondary and 70% at primary, compared to roughly 20% nationally. In 2019 (last set of results) pupil premium Progress 8 was +0.22 compared to -0.45 for disadvantage nationally.

**Robust analysis shows strong MATs can transform previously underperforming schools.** Robust analysis comparing annual cohorts of sponsored academies with similar local authority maintained schools shows that, on average, sponsored schools improve more quickly. Before they joined a trust, they performed significantly less well than otherwise similar schools. However, after joining a trust, the majority of sponsored academies demonstrate improvement, and their performance matches or exceeds these comparator schools.<sup>31</sup> More than 7 out of 10 sponsored academies which were found to be underperforming as an LA maintained school in their previous inspection now have a good or outstanding rating.<sup>32</sup>

### Supporting teachers and teaching

Strong multi academy trusts can use their scale, capacity and expertise to deliver on our objective in chapter 1 of this white paper, to have an excellent teacher for every child.

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<sup>31</sup> DfE. [An analysis of the performance of sponsored academies](#).2019.

<sup>32</sup> DfE. [Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child](#) - [See 'The case for a fully trusted system – data tables and methodology', Sponsored Academy Ofsted sheet]

We know that teachers and teaching make the biggest in-school difference to pupil outcomes, and our best trusts build communities of practice and mobilise evidence of what works. They provide access to shared teaching and learning resources, additional training, and career progression pathways. The best trusts also deploy excellent teachers where they are needed most, develop and share ambitious curricula, and deliver targeted support to raise standards.

**Strong MATs can mobilise expertise and research to develop and share teaching and curricular resources.** The last ten years has witnessed a revolution in how schools and teachers use evidence, with the Education Endowment Foundation at the forefront of this effort to disseminate the most effective classroom approaches. Our strongest trusts can use their scale to capitalise on the best evidence and research, using expert teachers and leaders to develop curricular and teaching materials, which can be shared and curated across the trust. This helps give teachers access to high quality materials to support evidence-based practice and can provide opportunities to reduce workload. DfE survey data<sup>33</sup> shows that 58% of primary schools had seen improved curriculum resources since joining a MAT whilst 89% experienced improvements in collaboration. The most effective trusts also think explicitly about how they can mobilise knowledge for classroom teachers, through effective professional development and by spreading evidence-led approaches trust-wide to support better outcomes for children.

## Case Study

### Sharing best practice at Northern Education Trust

In the Northern Education Trust (a MAT in the North of England with 10 primary and 11 secondary academies), leaders work collaboratively, sharing good practice and successful innovations, which are implemented trust-wide after piloting. There are also around 25 Directors (across the primary and secondary phase) covering almost all areas of the curriculum, allowing alignment between academies, reducing the planning burden on teachers, and allowing the pace of improvement to be accelerated.

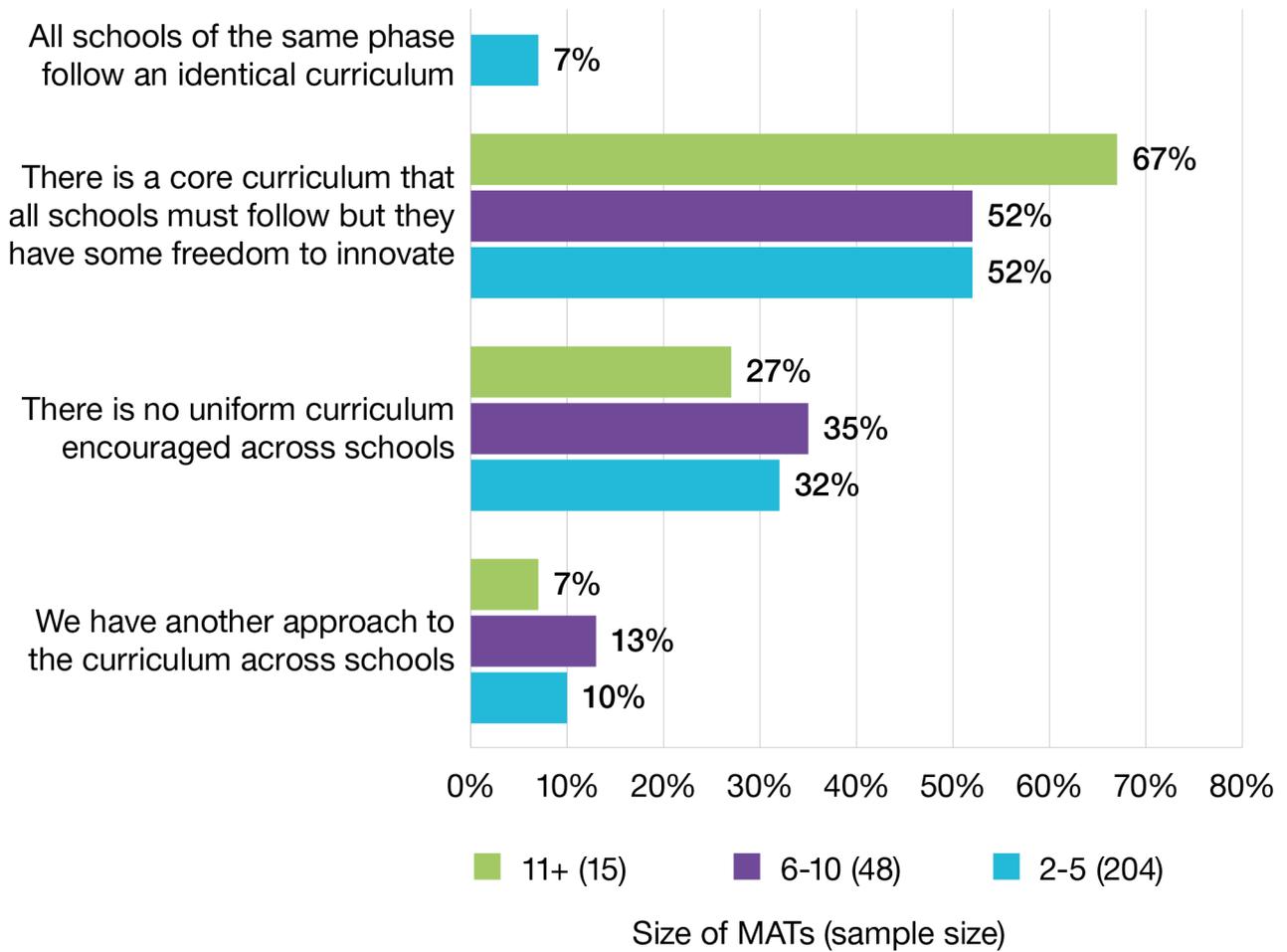
The majority of schools who have recently joined a MAT experienced improvement in sharing of skills and expertise with different schools – with 89% of primary schools and 92% of secondary schools experiencing improvements.<sup>34</sup>

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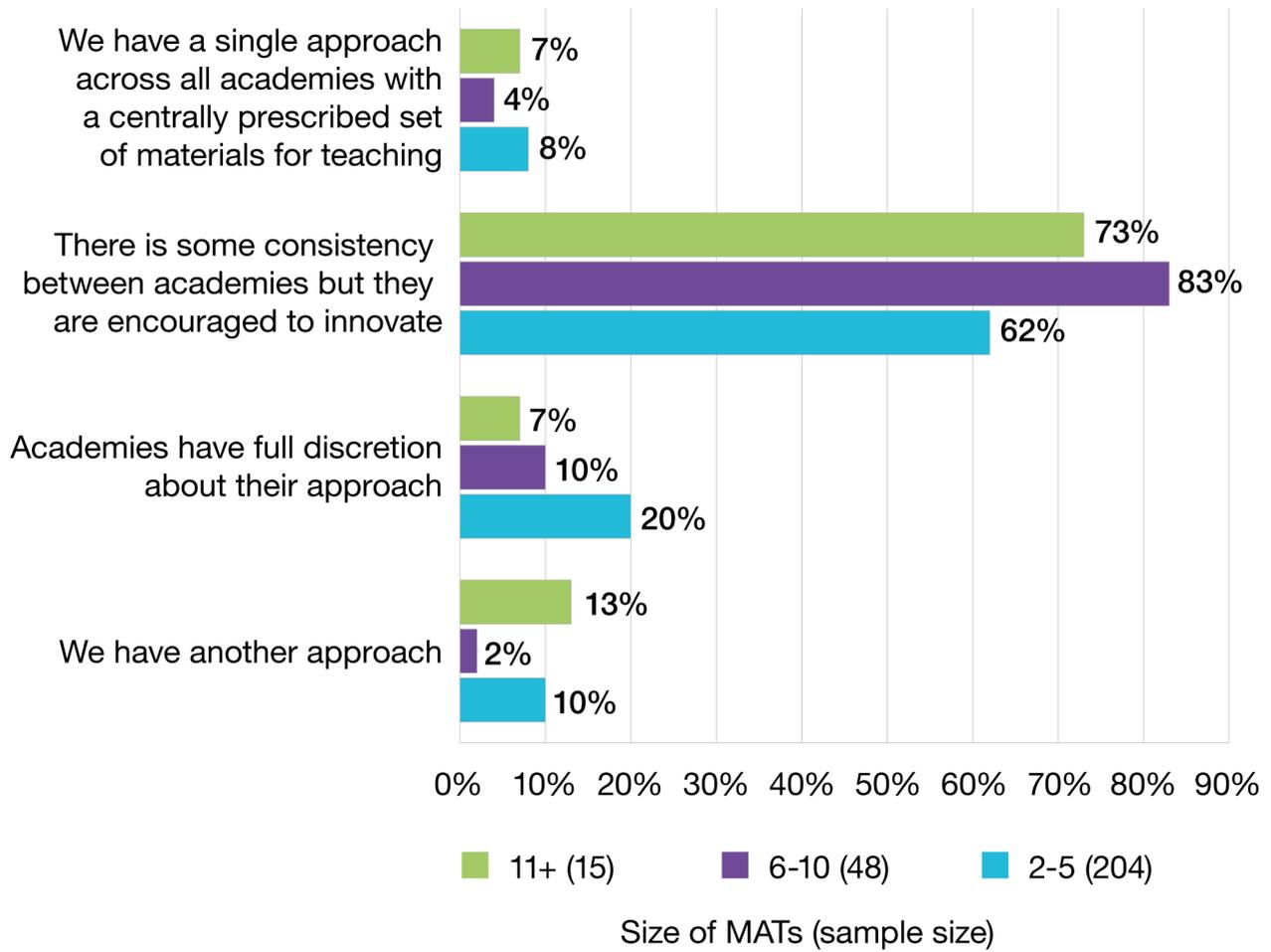
<sup>33</sup> DfE. [Schools' views: benefits and obstacles to joining academy trusts](#). 2021.

<sup>34</sup> DfE. [Schools' views: benefits and obstacles to joining academy trusts](#). 2021.

**Which of the statements below best describes how prescriptive you are to your schools in terms of curriculum?**



**Which of the statements below best describes your to teaching and learning in your academies?**



**Chart 8: Survey results showing the extent to which MATs use consistency in curriculum and teaching and learning approaches between their academies<sup>35</sup>**

<sup>35</sup> DfE. [Academy trust survey](#). 2017.

**Strong MATs can utilise evidence-based teacher and staff development.** Effective professional development can enable teachers to improve, and thus have a significant positive impact on pupil outcomes.<sup>36</sup> Multi academy trusts are able to determine the capacity, culture and conditions in which professional development is implemented across multiple schools.<sup>37</sup> Schools that have recently become academies in MATs have reported significant improvements in workforce development and deployment. 82% of primary and 76% of secondary schools reported improvements in training of staff. Already, 37% of primary and 43% of secondary schools who recently converted, experienced improvements to teacher recruitment and retention.<sup>38</sup> Every teacher should receive effective, evidence-based and ongoing profession development – and strong MATs ensure this is developed consistently across their schools.

## Case Study

### Professional development at Dixons Academies Trust

Dixons Academies Trust is a MAT of 15 academies in Bradford, Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester. They make time to invest in professional development in the form of deliberate practice sessions two mornings a week. Because of the strong culture in their schools, they're able to facilitate large whole year group sessions with a very small number of leaders while the rest of the staff take part in the professional development.

**Strong MATs can support teachers and staff to work where they are most needed, providing greater career development opportunities for teachers and senior leaders.** Teachers in MATs are more mobile between schools in their MAT and compared to those in other schools are more likely to move to schools within their trust serving more disadvantaged children as their career develops.<sup>39</sup> The MAT, as an employer across multiple schools, can provide increased opportunities for teachers to develop and build sustainable careers, access diverse career pathways across phases and specialisms, and realise leadership development opportunities. Many schools in more challenging contexts face difficulties in recruiting staff, and the MAT structure offers increasing opportunities to ensure these schools benefit from experienced staff.

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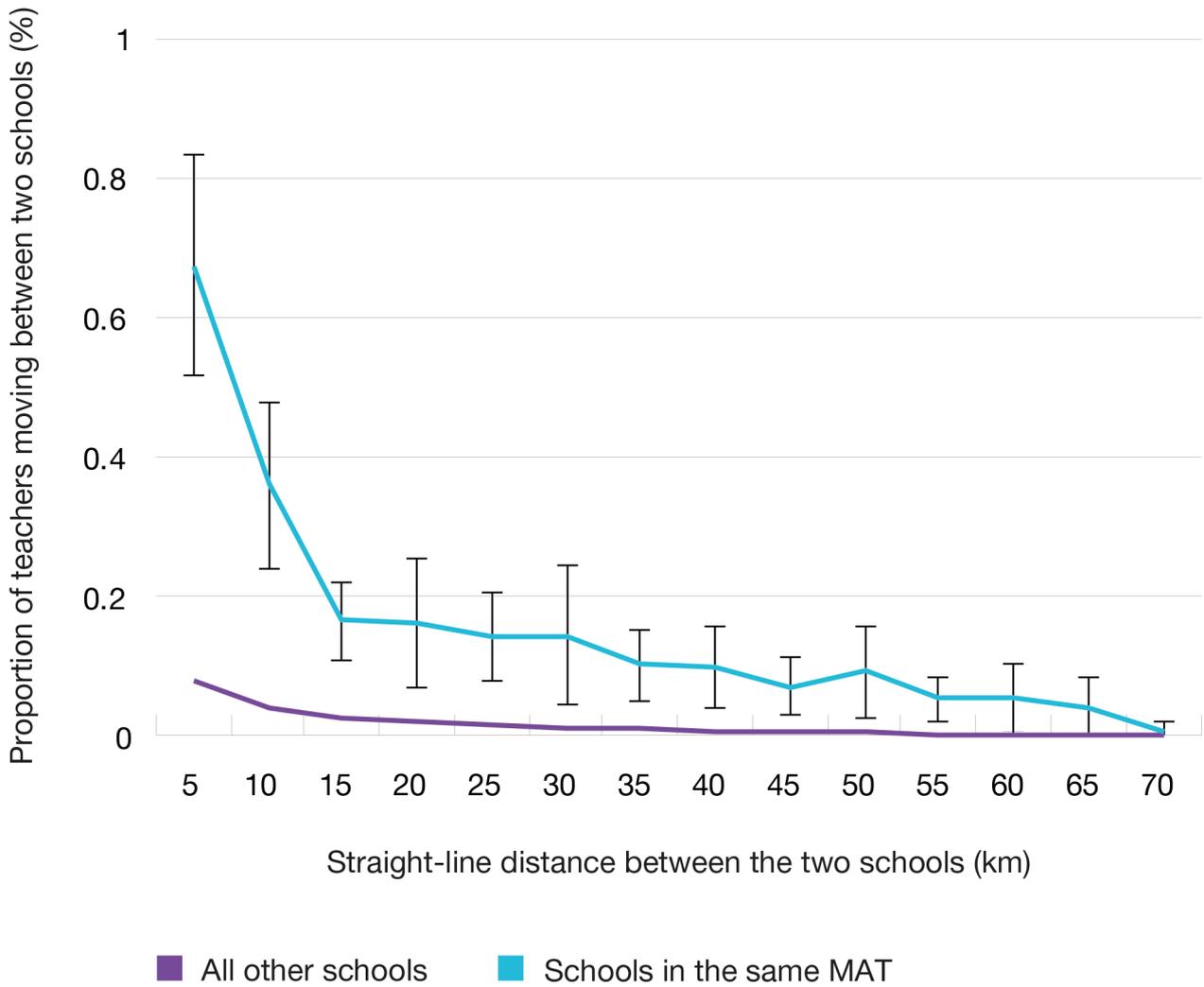
<sup>36</sup> Education Policy Institute. [Evidence review: The effects of high-quality professional development on teachers and students](#). 2020.

<sup>37</sup> Confederation of School Trusts. [Professional Development in School Trusts – capacity, conditions and culture](#). 2022.

<sup>38</sup> DfE. [Schools' views: benefits and obstacles to joining academy trusts](#). 2021.

<sup>39</sup> NFER. [Teacher Retention and Turnover Research: Teacher Dynamics in Multi Academy Trusts](#). 2017.

**Proportion of teachers moving between two schools (%) according to the distance between the two schools**



**Chart 9: Proportion of teachers moving between two schools (%) according to the distance between the two schools (km) and whether or not the school is in a MAT<sup>40</sup>**

<sup>40</sup> NFER. [Teacher Retention and Turnover Research: Teacher Dynamics in Multi Academy Trusts](#). 2017. The black bars indicate 95% confidence intervals

## Case Study

### The STEP Career Pathway

Investing in staff has always been a key strategic priority for STEP Academy Trust, a primary multi academy trust with 18 academies across South London and East Sussex. Indeed, the Career Pathway has been developed to provide a clear line of sight, for every member of the team, through to the most senior roles in the organisation. To facilitate progression, STEP offers a range of fully funded professional development opportunities, including apprenticeship, ECT, NPQ, Masters and Fellowship programmes. Many are internally delivered through STEP Ahead Teaching School Hub.

Critically, the Career Pathway also reinforces the guiding principle on which the trust has been founded – unity. STEP truly operates as a single organisation; a concept that must be embraced by every member of the team. For example, teaching staff see themselves as STEP teachers, serving the trust rather than a particular context within it. This approach opens up career development opportunities which would not otherwise be available, as staff move freely across the organisation, enabling their skills, experience and training to be fully utilised.

### Strategic leadership and governance

Strong leadership and governance are critical in advancing educational outcomes for children and can often contribute to embedding positive behaviour cultures in schools through a shared vision and values. Through the single governance structure, trustees (equipped with the right skills) effectively oversee the strategic direction of the trust and hold leaders to account. In addition, the structure of strong trusts can provide more opportunities to develop leaders of the future and extend their impact across a greater number of schools through in-house leadership training and development; observation and peer-to-peer support/mentoring across schools and opportunities to take on additional responsibilities across the trust.

**Strong trusts promote a shared vision and ethos across their schools.** Our strongest trust leaders ensure that an ambitious vision, underpinned by shared values, are firmly modelled, embedded, and communicated across their schools. Research<sup>41</sup> identified the value of an ambitious vision in groups of schools, highlighting that the majority of central and school-based staff could articulate the group's vision and values; and that where the vision and values were understood and subscribed to by staff, this helped support the development of a shared trust culture. 82% of schools report having experienced an improved sense of direction and purpose since joining a MAT.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> DfE. [Sustainable improvement in multi-school groups. Research Report, Professor Toby Greany, UCL Institute of Education/University of Nottingham.](#) 2018

<sup>42</sup> DfE. [Schools' views: benefits and obstacles to joining academy trusts.](#) 2021.

### **Strong trusts ensure robust accountability through the single governance structure.**

Along with the executive leadership, governors in strong trusts contribute to developing and setting the strategic direction across all of their schools. The governance structures within strong trusts can also effectively adapt to the challenges of bringing in new schools. Since joining a MAT, 69% of primary and 67% of secondary schools have experienced an improvement in school governance.<sup>43</sup>

### **Strong trusts provide the structure to support schools to withstand challenges.**

The organisational and governance structure of strong trusts enables them to support leaders and school staff to respond to shocks. Through effective financial management, workforce deployment, and trust-wide approaches to risk assessment and planning during emergencies, strong trusts support leaders, teachers, and staff to build resilience at school level. Following their autumn visits, Ofsted reported<sup>44</sup> that many schools in trusts had found the support they received to be invaluable. Schools reported that their trusts supported them with safeguarding; interpreting Covid-19 guidelines; developing remote learning and integrating this with the curriculum; and monitoring and supporting the health and well-being of all staff. In most cases, this central support went hand-in-hand with a consideration of local context, so policies could be tailored according for individual schools. School leaders also worked alongside other staff in the trust, sharing ideas, discussing guidance and learning from each other – allowing schools to learn how they could respond in similar circumstances.

## **Effective financial management**

Ensuring public funding is spent effectively and efficiently on improving outcomes for children is vitally important if we are to achieve our ambition to level up opportunity across England. Our strongest MATs do this most effectively – creating economies of scale, re-investing surpluses and sharing resources and facilities across the trust to build resilience and strong financial health. By centralising operational and administrative functions, schools within a MAT can save time and money which can be reinvested directly into the areas which have the greatest impact on children's outcomes<sup>45</sup> (including unlocking capacity to support weaker schools).

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<sup>43</sup> DfE. [Schools' views: benefits and obstacles to joining academy trusts](#). 2021.

<sup>44</sup> Ofsted. [The trust in testing time: the role of multi academy trusts during the pandemic](#). 2021

<sup>45</sup> DfE. [Sustainable improvement in multi-school groups. Research Report, Professor Toby Greany, UCL Institute of Education/University of Nottingham](#). 2018

**MATs typically achieve financial stability.** A higher proportion of academy trusts are in cumulative surplus or zero balance compared with local authority maintained schools (95.9% compared with 88% in Financial Year 2019/20). Academy trusts also have higher reserves as a proportion of income.<sup>46</sup> Within the academy sector, MATs on average are less likely than SATs to have a current/predicted deficit, qualified accounts or financial concerns (including notice to improve status). On all those measures, trusts of 15+ academies outperform other trusts on average.<sup>47</sup> As a result, trusts are more able to withstand shocks, deliver robust financial operating models that allow the maximum possible expenditure targeted towards education, and provide opportunities for re-investment in areas such as buildings, IT or additional support for learners.

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<sup>46</sup> DfE. [Academies consolidated annual report and accounts 2019 to 2020. 2021.](#); and Explore education statistics. [LA and school expenditure. Financial Year 2019 to 2020.](#)

<sup>47</sup> DfE. [Academies consolidated annual report and accounts 2019 to 2020. 2021.](#)

### Academy trusts (Annual year September to August)

	2018-19		2019-20	
	£millions	%	£millions	%
% of trusts in cumulative surplus/zero balance	£2.8 billion	94.0%	£3.17 billion	95.9%
Reserves as a proportion of income		10.8%		11.4%

### LA maintained schools (Financial Year April – March)

	2018-19		2019-20	
	£millions	%	£millions	%
% of schools in cumulative surplus/zero balance	£1.77 billion	90.1%	£1.72 billion	88%
Reserves as a proportion of income		6.4%		6.1%

Table 11: Reserve position in trusts and LA maintained schools between 2018/19 and 2019/20<sup>48</sup>

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Deficit/surplus position	Standalone Academies		MATs (2 - 5 schools)		MATs (6 - 10 schools)		MATs (11 - 20 schools)		MATs (21+ schools)	
	No. of schools	%	No. of schools	%	No. of schools	%	No. of schools	%	No. of schools	%
< (£0.5m)	11	0.7%	2	0.3%	9	3.2%	0	0.0%	1	2.0%
(0.5m) - £0.0m	67	4.6%	14	1.9%	5	1.8%	0	0.0%	1	2.0%
£0.0m - £0.5m	807	55.0%	159	21.5%	14	5.0%	4	3.2%	2	4.1%
£0.5m - £1.0m	345	23.5%	228	30.8%	40	14.3%	13	10.5%	1	2.0%
>£1.0m	237	16.2%	338	45.6%	211	75.6%	107	86.3%	44	89.8%
<b>Total number of trusts</b>	<b>1467</b>		<b>741</b>		<b>279</b>		<b>124</b>		<b>49</b>	

Table 12: Deficit and surplus positions in MATs by trust size<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> DfE. [Academies consolidated annual report and accounts 2019 to 2020](#). 2021. DfE. [Academy trust revenue reserves 2019 to 2020](#), [Local Authority and School Finance Data, 2021](#)

<sup>49</sup> DfE. [Academies consolidated annual report and accounts 2019 to 2020](#). 2021.

## Case Study

### Increasing efficiency at United Learning

United Learning is the country's largest multi academy trust, with 75 schools across all regions. The trust was established in 2003 and over the last 19 years has taken on a total of 54 schools which had been judged either Inadequate or Requires Improvement by Ofsted. Now, 94% of the academies which have been inspected as part of the trust are rated Good or Outstanding.

As it grew, United Learning set out to create economies of scale and increase efficiency in 'back office' services at the centre, in order to reinvest savings into educational spend (such as staffing and educational resources). In the last 6 years, United Learning has reduced its central non-educational costs by 18% in cash terms (29% in real terms).

Partly as a result, the trust spends much more of its funding than average across education focused activities such as teaching & teaching support staff, educational supplies, and ICT, across both primary and secondary schools.

**The centralisation of functions within MATs creates financial efficiencies.** The Kreston Academies Benchmark Report<sup>50</sup> found that centralisation of functions in MATs suggests economies of scale are increasingly being realised. For example, MATs have the ability to get the best value when procuring and using our commercial frameworks. Procurement of IT and back-office services for MATs (as larger organisations) can offer an enhanced negotiating position and deliver savings that can in turn be re-invested by the MAT. 71% of primary and 67% of secondary schools surveyed say they have experienced cost savings and efficiencies.<sup>51</sup>

**MATs benefit from robust financial planning, in-house expertise and robust financial governance.** MATs are more likely to have a Chief Operating Officer or Finance Director, providing effective oversight of financial operations, making best use of the department's School Resource Management tools, ensuring value for money and providing effective scrutiny of the non-educational aspects of running effective schools.<sup>52</sup> Central support for these tasks drives up standards and enables headteachers and leaders to focus their time on improving educational outcomes, and in the longer term enables more money to be invested in children and improvement priorities. MATs can also benefit from capital advisers, who will provide expert support to MATs to improve their estate management practices, offering realistic and practical insights and suggestions.

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<sup>50</sup> Bishop Fleming. [Academies Benchmark Report](#). 2020.

<sup>51</sup> DfE. [Schools' views: benefits and obstacles to joining academy trusts](#). 2021

<sup>52</sup> DfE. [Survey of school business professionals](#). 2019.

**MATs utilise effective systems and tools to ensure resources are used as effectively and efficiently as possible.** Integrated Curriculum & Financial Planning, which helps schools plan the best curriculum for their pupils with the funding they have available, can have a greater impact across a MAT by allowing the deployment of available resources across multiple schools in a local area. MATs facilitate more widespread use of our financial benchmarking tools, to help schools and trust understand their financial position (income, expenditure and performance) and compare themselves to similar schools and trusts.

## Case Study

### Integrated Curriculum Financial Planning (ICFP) at Delta Academies Trust

Delta Academies Trust operates 51 academies in the North of England (with cross-phase and mixed specialisms) across 12 local authorities. Over the last 12 years the trust has successfully taken on and turned around schools judged either Requires Improvement or Inadequate. Of the six inspections that have taken place since 2020, all schools were judged as Good by Ofsted.

Delta Academies have utilised ICFP to enable considerable efficiencies across the trust, allowing for a range of reinvestments. The implementation of ICFP enables the trust to maintain a 10% surplus, which equated to approximately £14m in 2020/21. This surplus is being invested into areas including capital projects across the trust.

In a recent conversion of Goole Academy (who joined Delta Academies in 2018) the implementation of ICFP has enabled a complete turnaround of the school's financial position. Due to the flexibility created by the MAT structure, the trust was able to invest £300k in ICT and £150k in the buildings at the point of joining. The academy has now moved from a £97k in-year deficit at the point of conversion to a predicted £200k in-year surplus in September 2022.

Savings can be reinvested directly into improving educational outcomes (e.g., curriculum expansion), which in the case of Goole Academy has contributed to Progress 8 scores rising from -0.44 to +0.37.



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