

Regional Schools Commissioners' Approach to Sponsor Matching

Sponsor matching takes place under two sets of circumstances:

1. the sponsorship of inadequate maintained schools; and
2. the transfer of an academy from one trust to another, due to an inadequate judgement, or by agreement with the National Schools Commissioner, in the event of failure of governance or financial health or other novel or contentious circumstances.

RSCs may also provide advice on potential academy trusts in other circumstances.¹

The guiding principle for sponsor matching is "...to ensure the [inadequate] school is matched with an academy trust that can support it [to improve]. This will be a strong MAT that can provide the benefits of collaboration and support from stronger schools."²

A range of factors are considered by a Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC)³ during the sponsor matching process.

Initial research

- Initial desk top review of the school concerned (special, Alternative provision, Faith, phase, age range, performance, Ofsted report, information about current trust capacity and performance, capital condition, financial position, for example.)
- Initial desk top analysis of sponsors already operating in the nearby area, or known to wish to expand into the area
- Views of the Local Authority, or Dioceses

Further detail

The profile of the potential sponsors identified through initial research is developed in more detail, and may also suggest additional sponsors:

- **Geography** (other sponsors either within 1 hour's drive or where there is potential to grow a new hub)
- **Profile** of sponsors (ethos, phase, age range, current size, specialism, capacity within operating model)
- **Capacity** (at that point in time in terms of trust leadership), demonstrably strong trust governance, and track record of school improvement (in the trust's own schools or leading improvement in other schools)
- **Financial Health** - the trust's current financial position (in particular, whether it has been in receipt of a Financial Notice to Improve (FNI) or where any material breaches of the Academies Financial Handbook (AFH) have been identified, together with latest financial forecasts; the last few years' financial trend and drivers; financial governance)
- **Diversity of provision** – it is the responsibility of the RSC to grow a sustainable and diverse set of providers and a proposed sponsor may not always be the most obvious, due to local circumstantial factors. The RSC may also consider the strategic value of a particular match – in respect of the point in the growth of a trust (supporting it to grow to the next stage or protecting capacity ahead of anticipated future need), or in respect of the coherency of the emerging trust network within a place.
- **Track record** of school improvement within the perspective of individual school contexts (Ofsted, performance, etc.)

Preparation for decision

¹ Outside of the circumstances listed above, RSCs and their offices may provide advice to, for example, maintained schools, or single academy trusts that are exploring options to join a multi-academy trust, or trusts looking to transfer an academy to another trust. In these situations, the RSC would broadly consider the same factors as when they consider sponsor match options (those set out on the page above). However, it would ultimately be for the school/trust and its leaders to consider any advice, and to take the decision on whether to proceed.

² Principles for a clear and simple school accountability system
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/principles-for-a-clear-and-simple-school-accountability-system>

³ For Faith schools please refer to the memoranda of understanding which underpin sponsor matching for Faith schools in addition to the considerations set out in this paper <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/church-schools-and-academies-memoranda-of-understanding>

There is no scoring attached to the process, with appraisals drawing on the evidence base available. Ultimately, the final decision as to an appropriate sponsor match rests with the Minister, with the RSC acting under his or her remit. On some occasions there are several sponsors who could provide a strong match. Where there is a finely balanced decision, or gaps in the evidence base, RSCs may seek additional information from trusts to support the decision-making process, using the template below. Such information may include the trust's reasons for its interest in the school, an assessment of its own capacity, proposed approach to stakeholder management, their initial assessment of support the school to be sponsored requires and improvement priorities, further financial information, risk management, and outline timescales to effect the transfer of the school.

Trust Information Gathering Template

This template has been provided to the trust to seek additional information to support the Department for Education's decision-making process regarding the preferred destination trust for a school or academy.

Information provided will be used in conjunction with information already held by the department, and will be made available to the RSC and Headteacher Board as part of the decision-making process. The final decision regarding the preferred destination trust will be made in accordance with the published [RSC Decision Making Framework](#).

<p>Context</p> <p>Briefly summarise the reason for the trust's interest in this school or academy joining the trust, including any local considerations</p>	
<p>Capacity</p> <p>Describe the educational performance and impact of the trust, with a particular focus on aspects most relevant to the school or academy; the trust's track record in achieving successful school improvement in any similar, relevant or related circumstances; the school improvement strategy and capacity the trust would deploy to achieve improvement; and the leadership (including governance) capacity within the trust and how it would be deployed to achieve improvement</p>	
<p>Relationships</p> <p>Describe the approach the trust would take to engagement with the school/academy, parents, community and others as appropriate</p>	

<p>Finances</p> <p>Provide a summary of the trust's financial capacity and expertise in the context of the school or academy.</p> <p>Please note: in evaluating financial capacity, we will consider the trust's current financial position (in particular, whether it has been in receipt of a FNI or where any material breaches of the AFH have been identified, together with latest financial forecasts; the last few years' financial trend and drivers; financial governance)</p>	
<p>Risk management</p> <p>Provide a summary of the risks that would be associated with the school or academy joining the trust, and plans to mitigate these</p>	
<p>Timescales</p> <p>Provide an outline of the timeline the trust would anticipate applying to the process of due diligence and transfer following confirmation as preferred destination trust</p>	
<p>Additional information</p> <p>An opportunity to provide any additional relevant information</p>	
<p>Completed by:</p> <p>Date:</p>	

Please ensure the completed template is no longer than 4 sides of A4, minimum font size 11. No additional information or appendices may be attached. Thank you.