

Multi-academy trusts: lessons learned in their journey so far

The Evolve Trust

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About this case study

This document is part of a series of case studies undertaken by the National Governance Association (NGA) exploring the barriers groups of schools have faced in their respective journeys since inception and what those governing and executive leaders have learned along the way.

This study does not make a judgement on the quality of governance or leadership across the trust. Instead, it shares the experience and key learning points offered by the interviewees themselves; where possible, in their own words.

To carry out this case study, NGA visited the Evolve Trust and interviewed the chair of trustees, the chief executive and two chairs of local academy committees. In addition, NGA also analysed key documents (including the scheme of delegation and articles of association) to supplement the data from the interviews.

NGA would like to thank the chair of trustees, the chief executive and academy committee members who gave up their time to speak to the project team.

National Governance Association

NGA is an independent charity representing and supporting governors, trustees and clerks in maintained schools and academies in England. NGA's goal is to improve the wellbeing of children and young people by increasing the effectiveness of governing boards and promoting high standards. It does this by providing information, guidance, research, advice and training. It also works closely with, and lobbies, UK government and educational bodies, and is the leading campaigning national membership organisation for school governors and trustees.

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Creation and development of The Evolve Trust

The Evolve Trust is a multi-academy trust (MAT) situated in Mansfield, Nottinghamshire. The MAT was formed in 2014 when Brunts Academy, a mainstream secondary school with around 1,500 pupils, sponsored a local special school, Beech Hill. The trust expanded again in 2015 when Brunts Academy sponsored a local primary school with around 200 pupils, the Robin Hood primary and nurse school. Today the trust consists of one secondary, one special and one primary school all located within a 5-10 minute drive of one another. The trust has a combined pupil roll of over 1,750 students. In terms of governance, the trust board currently consists of seven trustees. Each school has its own local governing body which feeds information up to the trust board.



Timeline of creation and development

Formation of the MAT

2012 Despite some trepidation from those governing, Brunts secondary school, an Ofsted rated 'good' school in Mansfield, converts to academy status. The rationale behind this is for the school to have more autonomy and to benefit from being able to spend the education services grant (which was cut in September 2017) as it sees fit. Upon conversion, the school is renamed Brunts Academy. Along with most other schools that were becoming academies at the time, trustees and senior leaders have no intentions of setting up a MAT.

Beech Hill School, a five minute drive from Brunts Academy, goes from Ofsted 'outstanding' to 'inadequate'. Leadership and management of the school is also judged 'inadequate'. Beech Hill School is a special school which caters for children with autistic spectrum disorder.

Brunts Academy is approached by the Department for Education to sponsor Beech Hill. The trustees are unsure about whether Brunts Academy has the expertise to sponsor a special school but are persuaded by the Department for Education (DfE).

While the MAT has a clear morale purpose (set by the chief executive and trustees) like many other newly formed MATs the trustees and executive leaders have no strategic plan for growth or clear vision for how the MAT would work.

Upon conversion, Beech Hill becomes the Beech Academy and the Evolve Trust is established. As part of the move to a MAT, the headteacher of Brunts Academy becomes the chief executive of all Evolve Trust schools. The assistant headteacher at Brunts Academy also becomes the head of school at Beech. The MAT operates out of the offices at Brunts Academy with little distinction between the leadership team at Brunts and the leadership of the Evolve Trust.

Shortly after the trust is established, another local school, Robin Hood primary and nursery school, is judged 'inadequate' by Ofsted. Following additional persuasion from the DfE, the trust agree to sponsor Robin Hood. Upon joining the trust, the school is renamed as Bramble Academy.

Period of consolidation

2015 With little separation between executive teams, there is confusion over where the staff team for the Brunts Academy ends and where it begins for the Evolve Trust.

The challenges faced by both the trust and trustees were exacerbated by the need to appoint an acting chief executive in 2015 (and the resulting loss of the experience of the then chief executive). The acting chief executive acknowledged the confusion and tension and, to create clear distinction between roles, the central executive team move out of Brunts Academy into rented offices separate from all schools within the trust.

New chief executive

2016 In early 2016 the chief executive of the Evolve Trust retires. The board look to secure an external chief executive and a national search is conducted to find a suitable candidate.



A new chief executive is appointed in September 2016. Alongside the trust board, the new chief executive looks to rebrand the Evolve Trust and move away from the idea that Brunts Academy is the 'lead' school. Furthermore, the executive team is streamlined with a clear focus on school improvement and the trust board is reconfigured after a robust and rigorous skills audit is undertaken. The chief executive and the trustees spend time developing a more coherent trust wide vision and strategy. The Evolve Trust also adopt core values and becomes a values driven organisation.

As part of the trust's vision and strategy, which involves helping other schools while growing sustainability, the Evolve Alliance is formed. Separate from the MAT, this is a network of around '*100 educationalists*' sharing good practice through conference events, journals and informal networks.

Looking to the future

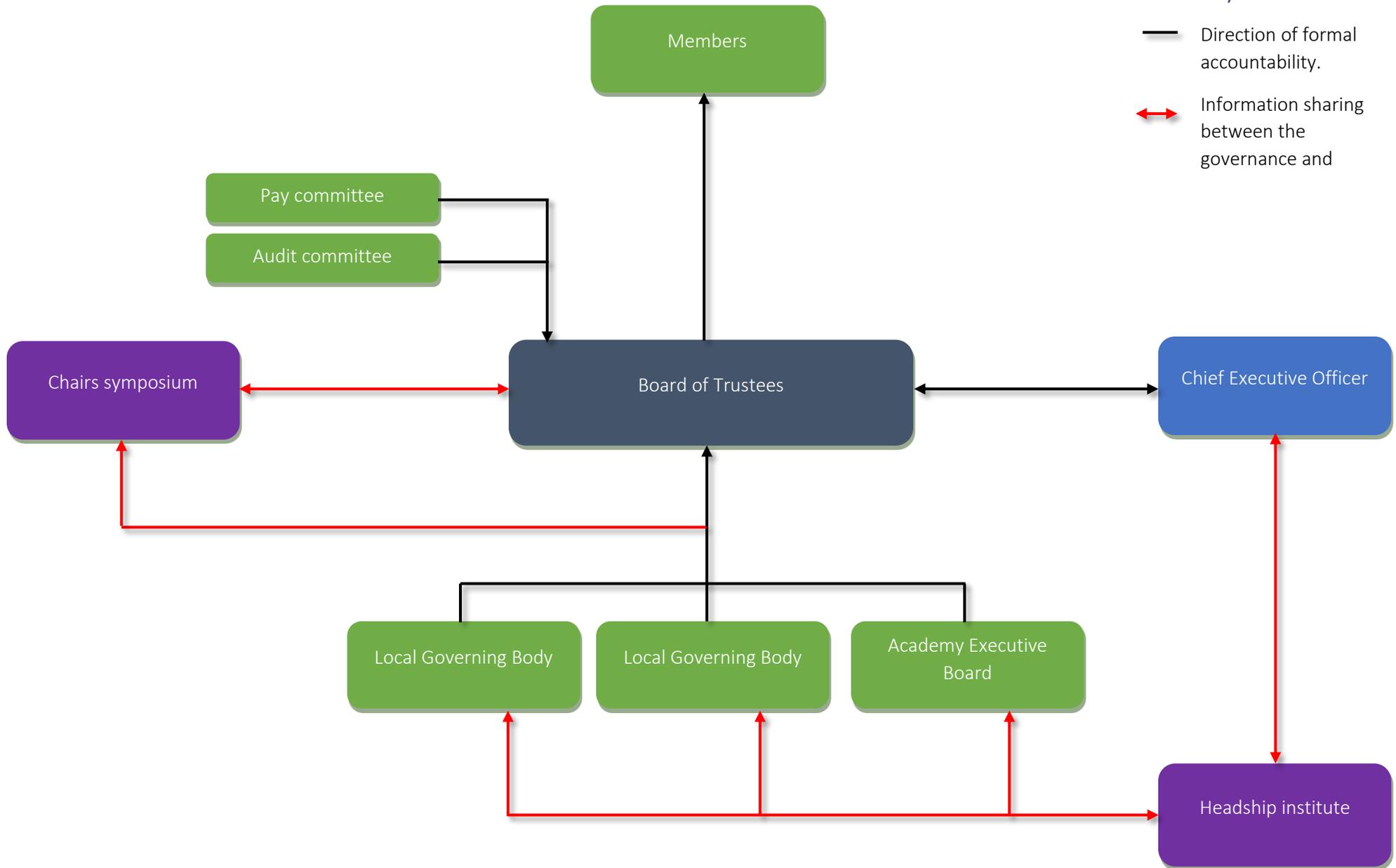
2018 Looking to the future, the trust currently has a five year strategy and are in the process of extending this to ten years. As part of this, the trust is looking to potentially expand. However, those governing and executive leaders' wants to ensure that any schools joining the Evolve Trust are clearly aligned with the MAT's vision and values. Ideally, the trustees and executive team wish to remain '*locally relevant*' and want three secondary, three special and three primary schools. Trustees and executive leaders also want a teaching school to capitalise on the trusts bespoke personal learning development pathways. The trust also want to expand and develop the Evolve Alliance further as a way of contributing to the education system as a whole.

Current Evolve Governance Structure

The diagram below shows the formal and informal lines of accountability between the layers of governance and the executive leader.

Key

- Direction of formal accountability.
- ↔ Information sharing between the governance and





Governance within the Evolve trust

The model above provides a useful overview of governance within the Evolve Trust. Interviewees described the Evolve Trust’s governance model as *‘fairly traditional’* with *‘members ... trustees board and ... local governing bodies for each of the schools’*.

There are currently two permanent committees of the central trust board, the audit committee which meets half termly and the pay committee which meets twice a year. The headship institute (consisting of all of the headteachers in the trust and the chief executive) and the chairs’ symposium (consisting of all local chairs, the chair of trustees and the chief executive) meet regularly to share information between the different layers of governance and management. Neither the chairs symposium nor the headship institute have any formal delegated responsibilities.

There are also three academy committees that meet once a term – one for each school within the trust. These are referred to as local governing bodies (LGBs) although the trust is considering renaming them to remove the reference to governance. This is to reflect the fact that the committees do not have the same legal responsibilities as a governing body in a maintained school. Each LGB has its own committees (also with termly meetings) for standards and effectiveness as well as pupil welfare and guidance. One of the LGBs has recently been replaced with an *‘academy executive board’*, with trustees recognising that local governance in that school needed improving. Responsibility for headteacher performance management sits with the chief executive of the trust.

In terms of roles and duties, the trust has a system of earned autonomy where the trust board gives each LGB different responsibilities based on their Ofsted rating. The trust has an [overarching scheme of delegation](#) for the whole MAT designed to show, in simple terms, what can and cannot be delegated by the trust board to the different layers of governance and management.

Fig 1: How Evolve present a summary of delegation across the trust.

Function	Delegated responsibility						Accountability
	M	TB	TBC	CEO	LGB	HT	
1. TRUST BOARD, GOVERNANCE AND STRATEGY							
1.a Appoint members	X						
1.b Remove members	X						

Accompanying this document, each school has a [more specific scheme of delegation](#) which outlines (in textual detail) exactly what power is retained by the trust, what is delegated to each school and which tier (either the trust board, a committee of the trust board, or the LGB) retains overall responsibility for different areas. As the trust operates with different levels of delegation for each LGB, having a distinct scheme for each school enables the trust board to address the specific decision making responsibilities within the MAT at a local level.

The scheme for each school outlines delegated responsibilities in relation to: vision, compliance, policies, educational standards, appointments, HR and performance management, services, media and PR, training, finances, assets and premises and governance.



Fig 2: A bespoke scheme of delegation for each school within the trust.

Aspect	Trust Powers (Retained)	Powers Delegated to Academy	Constitutional Decisions	Trust / LGB committee
Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> setting out the vision for the Trust and its application at both Trust and Academy levels determination of the corporate planning and strategy for the Academy and the Trust (in consultation with the LGB) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> work with the trust to determine corporate planning and strategy for the Academy to carry forward the Trust's vision, in a way appropriate to the specific qualities and community characteristics of the Academy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To determine aims, strategic priorities and longer term strategy To approve Academy improvement priorities 	Trust
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To determine Academy priorities and detailed actions plan for improvement and seek approval from Board of directors. To formulate and approve Academy Prospectus, associated documents and ensure published on all relevant media. 	LGB

The trust has made extensive changes to its governance since the MAT was formed in 2014, including separating the different layers and working to define the roles of members and LGBs as distinct from the trust board. These changes are covered in the ‘lessons learned’ section below (specifically, see lessons five to eight).

Lessons learned

From the interviews with those involved in leading the Evolve trust, a number of lessons emerged that can inform others involved in MAT governance. Some of these reflect the benefits that have been realised while others relate to challenges that those governing have faced.

Lesson one: Having a ‘lead school’ does not work in the long term

One lesson the trust has learned is that having overlap between the leadership, management and governance of a ‘lead school’ and the central MAT is not sustainable in the long term.

As briefly outlined in the timeline, when the trust was formed there was significant overlap between the senior leadership team at Brunts Academy and the executive leadership of the trust. On the formation of the MAT, a new headteacher was appointed at Brunts Academy but the chief executive of the trust remained in all but name the substantive headteacher of Brunts Academy and became the executive headteacher over Beech Academy and Bramble Academy. Furthermore, several of the leadership team at Brunts Academy (including the school business manager) had responsibilities within the central MAT team and at individual academy level.

This setup led to a confused structure where staff were unsure who, and which part of the organisation, they worked for. This led to both Bramble and Beech academies feeling as though there was little distinction between the governance and leadership of the trust and of Brunts Academy. In addition, Brunts Academy felt as though they had ‘given more’ to the MAT than other schools. As one interviewee outlined, Brunts Academy was *‘the lead school ... [and] at the beginning ... [they] paid an awful lot of money to the trust for central services, but the people delivering the central services were Brunts staff’*.

Many of the most experienced governors at Brunts Academy had become trustees of the MAT and there was substantial overlap between the Evolve Trust board, those that had previously governed at Brunts Academy, and the newly formed LGB at Brunts Academy.

The challenges associated with Brunts Academy being the ‘lead school’ were recognised with Evolve Trust leaders choosing to move the central team out of the Brunts Academy building.

Furthermore, to create a clearer distinction between Brunts Academy and the Evolve Trust, when the original chief executive left in 2016 the trustees made the decision to appoint an external chief executive who would have no substantial headships in any school. Further distinctions were also made between Brunts Academy staff and the trust staff, with the trust now employing a dedicated human resource director, a finance director and a director of school improvement to work equally across *all* schools.



Aside from these purposeful changes, one inadvertent factor which has helped move away from the idea that Brunts Academy is the 'lead school' is that there are very few 'original' senior leaders left in the trust.

Reflecting on these changes, the interviewees stressed the importance of making a distinction between the governance and leadership of the MAT and that of individual schools. To avoid some of the tensions the trust has faced, interviewees recommend doing this as quickly as possible: *'otherwise ... [the MAT] ...just becomes part of what you've got and not something new, and it needs to be something new'*.

Lesson two: Being clear about what the trust stands for in order to withstand pressures to expand

Another learning point for the trust was the need to be clear about what the trust stands for and to have a clear vision and values across the MAT. In other words, those governing and staff across the MAT (including each of the schools within the trust) need to understand *'why do we exist, what is our purpose and what is it that we are trying to achieve?'*

Trustees and senior leaders reflected that there was initially little strategic planning when the Evolve Trust was formed. Instead, senior leaders and trustees at Brunts Academy were persuaded to sponsor two distinctly different Ofsted 'inadequate' schools and were convinced by the DfE that they could make a difference. However, while the trust had a strong moral purpose and were prepared to support two struggling schools at the request of the DfE, the trustees at the time had not intended to form a MAT and therefore had not created a vision for how being part of one organisation would really benefit all pupils within the trust. This meant that, in the initial years, the trust did not have its own identity and consisted of three diverse schools (in terms of both phase and type) with no clarity around what they stood for collectively.

While those governing and senior leaders now have a clear purpose and vision for the trust, this was not easy to establish. Trustees and senior leaders needed to mould a strategy and vision around the existing schools within the MAT, taking into account their differences and wide-ranging priorities. In hindsight, trustees and senior leaders are now convinced that a better approach to establishing the MAT would have been for the trustees of Brunts Academy to have had a clear vision and set of non-negotiable values and for these factors to dictate how the MAT was going to be established, including which schools would join the trust and what the strategic priorities would be moving forward.

The trustees and senior staff at the trust therefore stress the importance of thinking strategically about growth, and establishing a clear strategic goal, vision and set of values, *before* looking to form a MAT. This is so that, if external pressure is applied to an academy trust to expand (i.e. by the local authority or the RSC), trustees and senior leaders can make an informed judgement about whether taking on new schools will help the trust achieve its strategic goal, whether the school buys into the trust's vision and whether the values of any prospective schools match that of the trust. When considering other schools coming into the MAT going forward, the trust will now look to ensure that there is a *'values match'* and to only bring in new schools that will benefit the others that are currently part of the organisation.

Lesson three: It is not all about growth; it is possible to develop an identity around being a small MAT and this has significant benefits

Building upon the second lesson, the Evolve Trust is keen to remain a small and *'locally relevant'* MAT in the future. The interviewees noted that the Evolve Trust is *'intentionally small'* and it is *'not going to grow to 30, 40 [or] 50 schools'*. This is out of a desire to maintain a *'small and compact'* feel across the trust. As a maximum, the trust is looking to grow to nine schools, with equal numbers of primary, secondary and special schools. This, they suggest, will maximise school-to-school collaboration across the trust.



All of those interviewed saw being a small MAT as beneficial. They argued that it was much easier for senior leaders within the trust to know their schools well and to understand their strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, the interviewees noted that, in a small MAT, it is much easier for executive leaders and trustees to communicate with school leaders and LGB members (and *vice versa*) and to retain a *'family feel'* across the trust.

Yet the commitment to remaining a small MAT has meant that the trust has needed to think carefully about how it will work with other schools. As the chair of trustees outlined: *'the reality is ... that ... when you become an academy trust [you sign a letter] saying you will support other schools, so you do feel a degree of internal pressure, on top of the DfE pressure, to actually live up to that promise'*.

Rather than growing the MAT, Evolve has instead chosen to fulfil this obligation by establishing a wider network of school-to-school support known as the *'Evolve Alliance'*. When interviewed, the chief executive emphasised that the aim of this alliance, as opposed to growing the MAT, is to overcome what she perceived as the *'fragmentation'* of the system, where *'multi-academy trusts [are] competing for schools'*, and struggling schools avoid seeking school-to-school improvement for fear of being absorbed into a MAT. As the chief executive outlined: *'it was my commitment to trying to stop the fragmentation of the system, and schools that work with us have got nothing to be frightened of, we're not going to take you over. It's about that sense of collaboration for us to inspire innovation, share best practice and have a self-improving system together'*.

Lesson four: Managing financial expectations across schools can be difficult

Another lesson the trust has learned is that there needs to be transparency around academy top-slicing and the central offer of the MAT. With the large secondary (Brunts Academy) giving substantially more than the other smaller schools, this is something that the trust has needed to manage carefully.

The trust charge its schools a sliding scale of top-slice: between three and five percent of their general annual grant (GAG). Ofsted 'outstanding' schools are charged three percent, 'good' schools are charged four percent and schools which are judged 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' are charged five percent. This is to account for the different degrees of support these schools will need. Nevertheless, as the top slice is based on a percentage of a schools' budget, Brunts Academy (which is much bigger than the other schools in the MAT and accounts for roughly 85% of the total pupil cohort across the trust) provide the bulk of central funding. This has the potential to cause tension amongst the schools: *'The only difficulty is - you're talking four per cent of [Brunts Academy's] budget, you're talking £369,000. When you're talking four per cent of somebody else's budget ... you're talking something like £60,000/£70,000'*.

To mitigate against any potential tension this might cause, the trust gives each school a breakdown of the services they receive in exchange for their top slice – called a *'statement of record'*. This shows LGBs and school leaders that their money is being spent fairly and proportionately across the trust. In addition, nothing is *'recharged'* back to schools with everything the trust board offers coming out of the top-slice. Finally, the trust aims to continually promote a culture of sharing between the schools within the trust, creating the mentality that *'we're a family of schools and we work together'*.

To further alleviate tension, the trust has been clear with all schools that the money they give to the trust will be invested in children's education. The trust has therefore worked hard to remove any financial overheads they consider to be unnecessary at trust level. This has included reducing the number of staff that make up the executive team which, according to the chief executive, used to be too expensive to justify. Furthermore, the finance director works closely with staff and those governing at a local level to set budgets, with the trust also welcoming challenge from LGBs about how money is spent. The trust does allow schools



to retain some freedom over their own finances, with each headteacher having responsibility with the support of the LGB to save towards a *'capital pot'* for future building or improvement work.

Lesson five: Clear delegation and methods of communication are vital for getting all voices heard while separating the different layers of governance

In addition to the lessons around forming a MAT and managing attitudes and relationships with schools, the trust has much to share in terms of governance. Since the MAT was created, it has changed its governance model significantly and has several lessons to share as a result. One of these lessons is around ensuring that there is no overlap between the different layers of governance while, at the same time, allowing for all relevant parties to get their voices heard.

Reflecting upon when the Evolve Trust was first formed, interviewees outlined that there was significant overlap between the different layers of governance – with the chair of trustees also appointed as a member of the trust, each of the LGB chairs appointed to the MAT board and the chief executive appointed as a trustee. While this model made communication across the trust easier, interviewees noted that it was difficult for the different governance and management layers to hold each other accountable.

Today, the trust is committed to ensuring that there is no overlap between the different layers of governance and that there is no duplication between the executive and governance functions. As such, it was jointly decided (by those governing and executive leaders) that the chair of trustees would no longer be a member and the chief executive would no longer be on the trust board. The trust is also committed to ensuring that there are no longer any LGB members sitting on the trust board.

'One of my key principles [as chair of trustees is that there should be] ... no overlap between the [different governance and management] bodies. So we have already taken ... our CEO ... off our trustees board, so [there is] no overlap between the senior leadership team and the trust board. We've [also] agreed that [the chair of trustees is] not going to stand as a member, so there will be no overlap between the members and the trustees.'

Nevertheless, despite recognising the importance of separating the different governance and management functions, doing so can mean that new structures need to be put in place to ensure effective communication between the different bodies. This is not only so that all relevant parties are able to have an input in the governance and management of the trust, but so that the different layers of governance are clear on what they are meant to be doing, there is no duplication of business and the different layers of governance can know their schools well.

Recognising the need to avoid duplication, each individual involved in governance or management at the Evolve Trust is given a resource pack containing the trust's strategy, details about the different layers of governance and a scheme of delegation for each school. We have also continued the longstanding practice of all senior leaders, trustees and LGB members having a decision planner which is updated every year and summarises what decisions have to be made by when and by whom. The interviewees stressed that this allows all relevant parties to be clear about who has responsibility for different areas and to ensure that business is conducted efficiently and accurately.

To ensure that all parties get their voices heard, information sharing is extremely important for the trust. The purpose of the chairs' symposium is information sharing back and forth between the chief executive of the trust, the chair of trustees and the three chairs of the LGBs. There is a standing item on the trust board agenda for the chair to feedback on these conversations. Similarly, the headship institute is another way for school leaders to communicate with the trust board. Here, the chief executive holds fortnightly meetings



with the three headteachers where their professional learning and development is enhanced. The headship institute is also an opportunity for the headteachers to feed information into the trust board.

The trust also uses less formal methods of communication to keep different parties informed. The chief executive produce a regular *'governance briefing that goes out to trustees and to local governing bodies around things that they need to be aware of such as policy changes [and] information that has come from the DfE'*. Furthermore, the chair of trustees puts together a briefing based on the trust's performance indicators which is shared with other trustees and LGB members. Finally, school staff within the trust also produce a *Heads-Up* magazine which is published every Friday and is sent out to all LGB members, MAT trustees and staff covering what is *'going on in each of the schools'*.

Lesson six: LGBs cannot fulfil all of a school's governance functions, but they play a crucial role in informing decision making by being the 'eyes and ears' of the MAT

Beyond thinking about governance and separation of responsibilities as a whole, the trust has also invested time in thinking specifically about the purpose of each layer of governance. Linked to lesson five (directly above), the trust has put a lot of work into defining the role of its LGBs.

'We want to define the role very clearly and, for us, that role will be about communication both ways. So that's communication from the academy up to the trust and making sure there is visibility of that academy at board level'.

The trust board sees the role of LGBs *'as the eyes and ears'* of the MAT – able to delve into some of the local issues in more detail than trustees. What the trust board find particularly useful is the local intelligence LGBs bring to the table and feed in through the chairs symposium. Amongst other activities, LGBs visit classrooms and are *'linked'* with different subjects/priority areas and engage in *'learning walks'*. This allow LGBs to not only *'get a view of what really is happening ... in a school'* but to ensure governance remains visible across the organisation. This gives LGB members the unique ability to question decisions made by trustees and executive leaders and to champion the needs of their school.

It is not, however, just trustees that find this information useful, with the chief executive attending all LGB meetings alongside the director of school improvement and, where the agenda is relevant, the finance and human resources directors.

Finally, due to their local intelligence, the trust has delegated responsibility to the LGB for holding the individual headteacher to account: *'Our job is to hold the headteacher [in our academy] to account and [make] sure that the children ... are getting quality first education'*.

Lesson seven: Trustees need to control the agenda for trust board meetings

Thinking further about the remit of the each layer of governance, another lesson the trust has learned is around managing the information that comes through to the trust board. This is to make the workload of trustees manageable and to ensure that they can execute their duties effectively.

Over time, the number of trustees on the board has significantly reduced. Before the MAT was formed the governing board of Brunts Academy consisted of twenty one individuals, with the chair of trustees acknowledging that *'it was unworkable, it really was. You could not even see to the end of the table, it really was silly'*. Now, there are a maximum of eight individuals on the trust board – with the trust using the NGA skills matrix to ensure that they have the right people around the table and regularly reviewing the performance of each trustee. While the trust outlines that this has professionalised governance, and has made the board more manageable, the small number of trustees means that the board needs to find ways to be effective while not *'overloading'* themselves with information.



When interviewed, the chair of trustees acknowledged that the board needs to ensure that it gets the appropriate level of information, with the chair of trustees seeing part of his role as ensuring that the board *'do not take detailed issues as part of the trust agenda'*.

'[We need to] create a system which produces the relevant information at the right level so that we are not overwhelming the board with a whole load of information which frankly means that none of it gets looked at properly. You want them to be looking in detail at the risk that you really feel are significant in terms of ... change, or in terms of their impact on the business'.

As such, rather than letting senior leaders decide the issues they are going to bring to the MAT board, the trust believes trustees should decide what will be discussed. This is to stop the unlikely but damaging scenario of senior leaders purposefully leaving things out and controlling what the trust board do/do not know. The trust board therefore ensure that there are clear key performance indicators (KPIs) for each area of business so that senior leaders and trustees are mutually aware of what needs to be reported. As the chair of trustees outlined, it is *'about us owning those KPIs, understanding what is important at a trust level and what can actually be quite happily dealt with and appropriately dealt with at the executive level'*. In addition, the chair of trustees outlined that the information given to the trust board needs to be enough for trustees to be able to *'pre-empt'*, and mitigate against, changes and challenges coming down the line. The chair outlined that, if anything unexpected happens, this is a clear indication that the trust board are not as prepared as they should be and are not doing enough to protect against risk.

Furthermore, as part of *'owning the agenda'*, the Evolve Trust board ensure that there is enough time to discuss strategy and vision at board level – with the chair of trustees acknowledging that the MAT has previously spent too much time discussing issues such as finances or school improvement rather than looking to the future. It was suggested that putting aside this time to discuss strategy and vision will help avoid a repeat of some of the issues experienced when the MAT was formed (see timeline and lessons one and two).

Lesson eight: Members have an important role to play as the guardians of the ethos and values of the trust

The final governance lesson the trust wanted to share revolved around the role of members. Initially, the trust put a lot of work into deciding who the members were going to be. However, much like LGBs, little initial thought went into discussing their purpose and role and responsibilities. There were concerns that members knew too little about the trust to play an effective role.

'That one meeting a year at the AGM when [members are receiving the] ... annual accounts ... [if members] ... have no understanding of what the trust is doing throughout the rest of the year [this] is not actually a good system or a good mechanism'.

The MAT has therefore invested time in reviewing the makeup, structure and the role of the trust's members. The MAT want its members to be able to protect the ethos and values of the Evolve Trust by ensuring that trustees are delivering a strategy that embodies what the organisation stands for.

'[Members are] the guardians of the ethos and values of the trust; so, for me, they [are] fundamentally ... there to make sure ... that the strategy of the trust is delivered'.

Interviewees outlined that a critical part of this role is *'to remove the trustees if things are going wrong'*. As such, the MAT is keen to appoint members that have the knowledge, judgement and conviction to act when necessary: *'if they are not prepared to act [when they recognise things are going wrong at trust level] and remove those trustees then they have no function whatsoever'*.



The trust has therefore increased the number of member meetings to one per term, with the trust board responsible for ensuring that in these meetings members *'understand exactly what they are holding [the trust] to account on and they're not overwhelmed'*. The MAT is currently looking to appoint additional members with a stake in the Evolve Trust's success, either because they are part of the local community or because they have previously been involved with the trust.

The future

The interviewees all felt that they, and the Evolve Trust as a whole, had learned a great deal since it was created in 2012 and that it was now a fundamentally different organisation. There was a genuine sense of excitement about the future and, although there was an acknowledgement that there will be huge challenges in the years to come, there was a feeling that the trust was ready to fulfil its potential and to be a powerful voice in its community over the coming years.