



House of Commons
Education Committee

Multi-academy trusts

Seventh Report of Session 2016–17

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to the report*

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The Education Committee

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Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Education Committee, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 1376; the Committee's email address is educom@parliament.uk.

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Summary

The number of schools forming and joining multi-academy trusts (MATs) has grown significantly over the last five years and the Government predicts that over the next five it will grow even further. The Government now expects that most schools which convert to academy status will join a MAT. However, evidence of their ability to raise pupil performance is limited and varied. The picture across England is very mixed with academies in trusts at both the top and bottom of recent league tables.

We have outlined six characteristics which we believe trusts must possess in order to be successful. These include strong regional structures, robust financial controls, enhanced opportunities for career development and tangible accountability at all levels.

Some of the earliest trusts expanded too quickly over wide geographic regions and the performance of their schools suffered as a result. We are encouraged by the development of a MAT 'growth check' and urge the Government to use this to ensure that trusts are only allowed to take on more schools when they have the capacity to grow successfully.

The role of Ofsted and Regional Schools Commissioners (RSCs) in holding MATs to account is crucial to the development of the MAT model. The relationship between Ofsted and RSCs, both nationally and regionally, remains unsatisfactory and we believe there is still more work to be done to clarify the distinction between Ofsted inspections and RSC visits. As MATs expand Ofsted must be given a new framework to conduct full inspections of trusts.

There is also more work to be done to ensure that MATs are accountable to the communities in which their schools are located. There must be more engagement with parents and clarity around the role of local governing boards.

The role and responsibilities of local authorities as MATs expand in size and number must be clarified by the Government. Further to this the Government should recognise the experience and expertise of the highest performing local authorities and allow their education departments to create MATs.

In order for the MAT model to succeed there needs to be a greater number of sponsors in the system. Certain areas of the country are struggling to attract new sponsors and small rural schools, largely in the primary sector, are at risk of becoming isolated. There is also growing concern for 'untouchable' schools which trusts refuse to take on. The Government should ensure that schools which are under-performing are not left behind by a programme which was originally designed to support such schools.

High performing trusts have a role in sharing their best practice and we recommend the Government creates structures to enable this. Finally, in order to support future expansion the Government should commission and publish independent, robust research on the structures and practices of the highest performing MATs.

1 Introduction

Background

1. The sponsored academies programme, launched in 2002, focused on struggling schools largely in deprived areas. In 2010 the Academies Act introduced ‘converter’ academies which gave all local authority maintained schools in England the right to convert to academy status. As the academies programme has developed since 2010, the Government have promoted multi-academy trusts (MATs) as a structure to support academies to collaborate and expand.

2. The Department for Education (DfE) defines MATs as:

Multi-academy trusts usually run more than one academy. The MAT has a single set of articles and therefore is a single legal entity accountable for a number of academies. The trust enters into a Master Funding Agreement (MFA) with the Secretary of State, and into Supplemental Funding Agreements (SFA) for each academy it operates.¹

3. In November 2016 there were 1,121 active MATs in England.² In comparison in March 2011 there were 391 MATs. In March 2016 65% of all academies and free schools were in a MAT, including 75% of primary academies and 51% of secondary academies.³ In November 2016 there were 21,525 state-funded schools in England of which 1,618 were stand-alone academies and 4,140 schools were in MATs.⁴

4. Our predecessor committee considered MATs as part of a wider inquiry into academies and free schools.⁵ The inquiry concluded that MATs are highly variable across the country and that whilst some are “very effective” at raising attainment, others “achieve worse outcomes than comparable mainstream schools”.⁶

5. This inquiry follows our report on the role of Regional Schools Commissioners (RSCs), which was published in January 2016.⁷ Eight RSCs were appointed as civil servants in September 2014 and are directly accountable to the Secretary of State. RSCs have responsibility for deciding on applications from local authority maintained schools, including making decisions on schools joining or setting up MATs. RSCs also have the power to intervene in under-performing MATs and re-broker schools where necessary. The eight RSCs are managed by the National Schools Commissioner (NSC), an increasingly powerful figure in the creation and expansion of MATs. Our inquiry into MATs is a continuation of our work into scrutinising the development and performance of the structures which support the academisation of the English school system.

1 Department for Education ([MAT 20](#)) para 6

2 Department for Education, *Experimental Statistics: Multi-academy trust performance measures: England, 2015 to 2016*, [SFR 02/2017](#), January 2017; of these MATs over 250 have one academy in them. The majority of MATs have between three and five schools.

3 Department for Education ([MAT 20](#)) para 31

4 Department for Education, *Experimental Statistics: Multi-academy trust performance measures: England, 2015 to 2016*, [SFR 02/2017](#), January 2017

5 Education Committee, Fourth Report of session 2014–15, [Academies and free schools](#), HC 258

6 Fourth Report of session 2014–15, [Academies and free schools](#) para 64

7 Education Committee, First Report of Session 2015–16, [The role of Regional Schools Commissioners](#), HC 401

Our inquiry

6. We launched our inquiry on 18 March 2016, and invited submissions of written evidence in respect of the following terms of reference:

- The role of MATs in the context of other intermediate structures operating between Whitehall and individual schools, including Regional Schools Commissioners;
- The current MATs landscape, including in terms of the number, size, and geographical coverage of MATs;
- The balance of decision-making at the individual school level and at the chain level, and the appropriateness of formal governance structures employed;
- How the expansion of MATs should be monitored and managed;
- The characteristics of high-performing MATs;
- How the performance of MATs should be assessed.

7. We received 60 written submissions during our inquiry and took oral evidence on five occasions. Our witnesses included the National Schools Commissioner, Sir David Carter, the former Chief Inspector of Education, Children’s Services and Skills, Sir Michael Wilshaw, three RSCs and a panel of MAT Chief Executives. In our final session we heard from Lord Nash, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the School System and Peter Lauener, Chief Executive of the Education Funding Agency (EFA).

8. In addition to our formal oral evidence sessions, we held an engagement event with parents in Westminster on 24 October. This was an opportunity to hear the views of parents on MATs and listen to their experiences of trusts in their local community. Details of this event are included in Annex 1. We visited Eastbrook Primary Academy, part of Reach2 MAT, on 1 November and spoke to teachers, senior leaders and Reach2’s Chief Executive, Sir Steve Lancashire. During this inquiry we also benefited from the advice of Professor Becky Francis, now Director of the UCL Institute of Education.⁸ We place on record our thanks to Professor Francis, Eastbrook Academy, and all those parents who gave their time to attend our event in October.

Changes to Government policy during the inquiry

9. The Government’s policy on academies has shifted considerably since we launched our inquiry. We launched the inquiry shortly after the Government released its white paper *Educational Excellence Everywhere* in March 2016.⁹ The white paper announced the Government’s intention to require all schools to become academies by 2022. It also stated that “most schools will form or join MATs”.¹⁰ Following cross-party criticism of

8 Professor Francis, Director of the UCL Institute of Education declared interests as a Trustee of Impetus-PEF, an advisory board member of the Education Endowment Foundation, a member of the Pan-London RSC Board, a governor of Hinchley Wood School and a member of the Labour Party. Professor Francis also advised the Committee during their inquiry on Academies and free schools (2014–2015) and the Role of Regional Schools Commissioners (2015–16).

9 Department for Education, *Educational Excellence Everywhere*, [Cm 9230](#), March 2016

10 *Educational Excellence Everywhere*, [Cm 9230](#), March 2016, p 16

the element of compulsion in the Government's plans, on 6 May the Government dropped its plans to force all schools to become academies, stating that legislation on forced academisation would not be brought forward. Later in May the Queen's speech included reference to a Bill entitled the Education for All Bill. Instead of forcing schools to convert to academy status, this Bill would set the "foundation for a system in which all schools are academies".¹¹

10. In a Written Statement on 27 October the new Secretary of State, Rt Hon Justine Greening MP, announced that the Education for All Bill would not be brought forward in this Parliamentary session.¹² This signalled a move away from the white paper of March and commitments made by the previous Secretary of State.

11. The majority of the written evidence was received during the time that the Government was pursuing full academisation by 2022.

12. There have been several changes to academy policy over the last year which have caused instability and uncertainty in the sector. Evidence we heard from Lord Nash indicated that the Government expects that in five to six a years a "tipping point" will be reached where most schools have converted and joined a MAT. As trusts grow in size and number we urge the Government only to promote expansion that prioritises performance.

11 Cabinet Office, *Queen's Speech 2016: background briefing notes* (May 2016), p 34

12 HC Deb, 27 October 2016 [HCWS223](#)

2 The characteristics of high-performing multi-academy trusts

13. Throughout the inquiry we asked witnesses what characteristics the most successful MATs possess. Common themes emerged, including: strong leadership, clear governance frameworks, continuous professional development for teachers and strong financial management.

14. In October Sir Michael Wilshaw released an Ofsted commentary on high performing MATs and what they have in common.¹³ Ofsted looked at seven high-performing MATs which “have a track record of taking on a number of previously underperforming schools and leading them on a journey to good or even outstanding”.¹⁴ The commentary concluded that strong trusts tended to share a set of common characteristics, including:

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

15. During our session with three RSCs we asked their opinion on these seven points and whether they would add anything. Rebecca Clark, RSC for the South West, commented:

The only thing that I would add is that I think the very best MATs have an alignment of values and a vision that enables schools to work together as one [...] Great MATs give an opportunity for us to reduce within-school variation at a different scale so that all schools are performing to the level of the very best by learning from the very best. To do that, you have to have real clarity around what your economic model is, what your target operating model is and what your education model is.¹⁵

13 Ofsted, [‘HMCI’s monthly commentary’](#), accessed 19 December 2016

14 [‘HMCI’s monthly commentary’](#), accessed 19 December 2016

15 Q374

16. In his previous role as RSC for the South West, Sir David Carter produced his own “characteristics of successful multi-academy trusts”.¹⁶ His nine steps included:

- a clear accountability framework for the performance of the Trust that all staff understand;
- a clear delegated framework for governance at Trust Board and local governing body level that makes the responsibilities of both the Board and any LGBs explicit;
- a Trust wide commitment to making a contribution to local, regional and national educational networks beyond the MAT.

17. In our final evidence session, we asked Lord Nash for his thoughts on what distinguishes the best performing trusts from others. He responded:

Successful multi-academy trusts are run by tough people who put children first. They have a sense of pace and urgency. They have strong governance and financial control. They are well organised, with good geographic focus, with a good balance between strong and weak schools, clear reporting lines and good performance management. Good financial control and high-quality finance people to ensure that much more money is available in the classroom. They have well developed CPD programmes, good leadership development structures; they identify their rising stars and develop their careers. They have very good staff retention. They have standardised procedures, providing supportive materials to help teachers’ workload and support consistent teaching. They engage in wider system discussions to share good practice. They have high expectations. They believe in stretching all pupils. They understand education is not just about exams; it is about developing children’s resilience and their mental toughness. They have good connections with the world of work. They have behaviour management strategies that are clear, effective, consistently applied and easily understood by staff and pupils, and they have an absolutely clear central vision and ethos.¹⁷

Our view

18. After hearing evidence from a wide range of witnesses on what characteristics the highest performing MATs have, we have formed our own view. Subsequent chapters will provide more detail on each point. We believe the most successful MATs share the following characteristics:

- **Recognition of the crucial role played by teaching staff**—enhanced opportunities for professional and career development should be available at trust level and pipelines to leadership established;
- **Regional structures which allow schools to share expertise and resources**—the most successful trusts are those which pursue cautious expansion in a relatively limited geographical area;

16 DfE, ‘[Characteristics of successful multi-academy trusts](#)’, accessed 19 December 2016

17 Q422

- **Mechanisms for tangible accountability at all levels**—trusts should focus on both upward accountability and local engagement and publish clear schemes of delegation;
- **Robust financial controls**—trusts should foster cultures and systems which promote effective use of public money in the delivery of education;
- **A shared vision for school improvement across all schools within the trust**—strong leadership at both school and trust level with expertise and resources shared across the MAT;
- **A commitment to improving performance and attainment**—the best trusts make performance across all student groups a priority, and are therefore succeeding in raising attainment and progress for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as for other pupil groups.

3 Accountability and inspection of multi-academy trusts

19. Both Ofsted and the RSCs play a role in holding MATs to account. RSCs are expected to intervene in MATs which have performance, governance or financial management issues. Ofsted inspect the educational performance of individual academies and have a role in reviewing the performance of MATs. The DfE state that powers are “careful balanced” between these organisations.¹⁸

Ofsted and the DfE’s accountability measures diagnose quality, RSCs commission intervention, a contestable market delivers the intervention.¹⁹

The role of Ofsted

20. In January 2015 the then Secretary of State, Rt Hon Nicky Morgan MP, set out her views on the arrangements by which Ofsted inspects the performance of MATs.²⁰ A letter to Sir Michael Wilshaw described the process of “batched” inspections where Ofsted inspects several schools within a trust. These inspections are followed by a public letter with a judgement from Ofsted on the overall performance of the MAT.

21. The extent to which Ofsted should be given powers to inspect individual MATs was discussed within several pieces of evidence we received. The Sutton Trust told us that:

Ofsted has done more to inspect academy chains recently using existing powers but these inspections should be formalised, with a specific remit to inspect how they support the teaching, leadership and educational services within their schools.²¹

22. Similarly the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) wrote that Ofsted should be given the same powers to inspect MATs as it currently has to inspect local authorities.²² There is also no mechanism for inspectors to follow up their inspection reports on trusts and no duty for the Department to respond to Ofsted’s ‘batched’ inspections.

23. In evidence to us Sir Michael made it clear that these inspections do not go far enough.

The issue of concern to me is: what happens when we find things are going wrong across a number of academies within a trust? What happens then if we want to do more exploration as to why things are going wrong across a number of schools? How much money is being spent on the children and on other issues? Is the quality of monitoring good enough in the trust? The issue is: what happens if we find things are going wrong and we need to do much more exploration as to why?²³

18 Department for Education, [Regional schools commissioners decision making framework](#), December 2016, p 3

19 [Regional schools commissioners decision making framework](#), December 2016, p 3

20 Department for Education, [Letter to Sir Michael Wilshaw](#), January 2015

21 The Sutton Trust ([MAT 12](#))

22 Association of Teachers and Lecturers ([MAT 13](#)) para 4

23 Q3

24. Sir Michael called for Ofsted to be given a framework to inspect the central services of MATs, in a similar way to which they currently inspect local authorities. Sir Michael was succeeded as Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) in January 2017 by Amanda Spielman. At her pre-appointment hearing in June 2016, she said:

The system is evolving rapidly. I cannot imagine that, in a few years' time, it would be possible to have an inspection system that does not include multi-academy trusts [...] Over time I think it is highly likely that we will end up with a multi-layered inspection model, and for me that would be a good development, but I think it is something that is part of the evolution of the system. It is not something that you can just snap a switch and say, "This is it."²⁴

25. In September, the Secretary of State indicated that the Government was re-considering the role of Ofsted in inspecting trusts.

My sense is there is a question to be asked about how Ofsted can effectively inspect MATs and whether there is a smarter way to do it [...] I should also say though that we need to be clear that some of these other issues I talked about—governance, financial sustainability, risk management—are not necessarily things that Ofsted per se would necessarily have the expertise to particularly take a view on.²⁵

26. In the final evidence session of this inquiry, Lord Nash told us that "it is not part of the skillset of HMI to analyse the finances or governance or organisation structure of a MAT".²⁶ He went on to say that it was the EFA's job to look at finances and governance, rather than Ofsted's. Several MATs also took this view in their evidence. Oasis Community Learning agreed with Lord Nash by stating "that assessing the organisational effectiveness (infrastructure and governance of a charitable organisation) of a MAT is not within Ofsted's skillset".²⁷ Similarly Academies Enterprise Trust (AET) criticised Ofsted's lack of understanding of governance structures. Despite this they did call for a formalised "transparent and agreed framework for inspection" of trusts.²⁸

27. There is a gap in assessing MATs which neither Ofsted nor RSCs presently fulfil. The current situation of Ofsted conducting 'batched inspections' is not sustainable or sufficient as MATs expand over the next five to six years. It is not a formal inspection or accountability process and does not necessarily lead to intervention from Ofsted or the Department.

28. *Ofsted needs a new framework for MAT inspections and should develop the resources, skills and powers to conduct full inspections of trusts.*

24 Oral evidence taken on 29 June 2016, HC (2016–17) 170, Q58

25 Oral evidence taken on 14 September 2016, HC (2016–17) 196, Q254

26 Q391

27 Oasis Community Learning ([MAT 35](#)) para 52

28 Academies Enterprise Trust ([MAT 38](#)) para 2.25

The relationship between Regional Schools Commissioners and Ofsted

29. Our previous report on RSCs highlighted the need for the Government to clarify the division of responsibilities between RSCs and Ofsted:

We recommend that Ofsted and the national Schools Commissioner consider further how they could ensure that RSC and Ofsted visits to schools are coordinated and do not create an unnecessary burden on schools. Further, they should ensure that schools are clear about the distinction between Ofsted inspections and RSC visits.²⁹

30. Evidence we received during this inquiry indicated that this has not yet been done. We also recommended that the Government should redesign the RSC regions so that they are coterminous with Ofsted regions.³⁰ This recommendation was rejected by the Government in its response, but evidence during this inquiry indicated that there is still appetite for alignment of the regions.³¹

The relationship between RSCs and Ofsted's regional directors could potentially be a very important one but is limited because regions are not aligned.³²

31. We heard that the continuing crossover between the role of Ofsted and RSCs is confusing for trusts, individual schools and parents. The National Governors' Association (NGA) told us they would like to see "further clarity defining the relationship between Ofsted and the RSC".³³ The Education and Adoption Act 2016 expanded the remit of the RSCs, giving them power to convert maintained schools judged to be 'inadequate' by Ofsted and intervene in schools judged to be 'coasting' regardless of their Ofsted rating. This brought the remit of RSCs and Ofsted closer. The National Union of Teachers (NUT) told us that the passage of this Act "exacerbated" the "confusing duplication between the remits of Ofsted, and RSCs".³⁴

32. This confusion is felt amongst teachers, schools and trusts. Professor Toby Greany and Dr Melanie Ehren from UCL Institute of Education commented on headteachers' experiences of working with RSCs and Ofsted:

Head teachers tell us that the frameworks used by Regional Schools Commissioners to monitor quality are unclear and that differences in the frameworks used by their trust, by Ofsted and by the Regional Schools Commissioners can create conflicting expectations around which areas schools need to improve on.³⁵

29 Education Committee, First Report of Session 2015–16, *The role of Regional Schools Commissioners*, HC 401, para 133

30 *The role of Regional Schools Commissioners*, HC 401, para 59

31 Education Committee, Fifth Special report of Session 2015–16, *The role of Regional Schools Commissioners: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2015–16*, HC 975, p 7

32 National Governors' Association ([MAT 44](#)) para 91

33 ([MAT 44](#)) para 91

34 National Union of Teachers ([MAT 15](#)) para 15

35 Professor Toby Greany and Dr Melanie Ehren, UCL Institute of Education ([MAT 10](#)) para 21

33. Similarly parents told us that they found the position of RSCs difficult to understand, particularly compared to Ofsted whose role is broadly understood.³⁶

34. All three RSCs spoke about their relationship with their Ofsted counterparts during their evidence to us. Jennifer Bexon-Smith, RSC for East Midlands and the Humber, told us that she met face-to-face with the Ofsted regional directors a minimum of once a term and keeps in regular contact via phone calls.³⁷ When asked whether MATs should be inspected by Ofsted, Rebecca Clark replied:

I think that the current position is that we look at the quality of multi-academy trusts, the quality of the individual schools within them, so the current arrangement whereby Ofsted will go and inspect individual schools seems to me to give us a really clear picture of how well those trusts are serving the interests of the children in the communities.³⁸

35. This lack of clarity over the roles of Ofsted and RSCs has had a detrimental effect on MAT oversight. At points during our inquiry, the relationship between the National and Regional Schools Commissioners and Ofsted appeared to be strained. During oral evidence to us in March 2016 Sir Michael called RSCs “faceless” and added:³⁹

I am not clear what the regional schools commissioners do, other than re-broker failing academies. Sometimes relationships are a bit tense, because we believe that RSCs should be doing more with underperforming academies, not just those ones who fail.⁴⁰

36. Sir Michael also stressed Ofsted’s independence, in comparison with RSCs whose role he said is to “champion academies”.

37. Two previous Committee reports have recommended that the Government clarify the division of responsibilities between RSCs and Ofsted in a way that is comprehensible to schools and parents. There remains too much overlap between the roles of Ofsted and RSCs.

38. *The Government should follow our previous recommendation and align Ofsted and RSC regions. There is also more work to be done to clarify the distinction between Ofsted inspections and RSC visits.*

Governance structures

39. The expansion of the MAT model represents a significant shift in school governance. Joining a MAT means there is a shift in accountability away from local governing boards to a central trustee board who hold the decision making responsibilities. The trustees are responsible for the same three core governance functions performed by the governing body in a maintained school: setting the direction, holding the headteacher to account and ensuring financial probity. The extent of the powers of the local governing board is

36 See Annex 1

37 Q306

38 Q309

39 Oral evidence taken on 2 March 2016, HC (2015–16) 650, Q68

40 HC (2015–16) 650, Q66

dependent on what the MAT board has delegated to them and it is possible for these local boards to be purely advisory. The NGA has been critical of the Government's efforts to make this crucial shift to a centralised trustee board clear:

NGA is concerned that the Department for Education (DfE) advice for performance, accountability and governance in MATs is lacking. Where DfE advice and practice does exist, it lacks clarity and often consistency across the department [...] NGA would like the DfE to provide more in terms of generic advice including guidance on structures and accountability that MATs could then choose from.⁴¹

40. The NGA warned that there can be a power struggle between trust boards and local governing boards where changes have not been well communicated.⁴² In oral evidence to us Emma Knights, Chief Executive of the NGA, stressed the importance of Schemes of Delegation, which she said every MAT should publish.⁴³ The NGA called the Scheme of Delegation “the key document for defining the relationship between the MAT trust board and its schools”.⁴⁴ It crucially “establishes who makes which decisions and ensures all those within the MAT and governing bodies of schools potentially looking to join a MAT are clear”.⁴⁵

41. In December 2016 the Department published ‘Multi-academy trusts: good practice guidance and expectations for growth’, which included advice and examples of best practice.⁴⁶ It included “10 characteristics of governance in effective MATs” and used Reach2’s governance structure as an example of a model which works and could be replicated. At a similar time the Department updated their Governance handbook.⁴⁷ A new section in the handbook states:

As the accountable body, the board is the key decision maker [...] the board as a corporate entity remains accountable and responsible for all decisions made.⁴⁸

42. *While we welcome the Government’s recent document which set out examples of best practice in governance, there is still significant confusion about the move to boards of trustees being the accountable bodies for MATs. This move has not been communicated well enough by the Department and has led schools to join or start trusts without full knowledge of how their governance structures will change. The Department must improve and extend the advice and guidance they offer.*

41 National Governors’ Association ([MAT 44](#)) para 51–52

42 ([MAT 44](#))

43 Q208

44 National Governors’ Association ‘[Developing your scheme of delegation](#)’, accessed 4 January 2017

45 National Governors’ Association ([MAT 44](#)) para 59

46 Department for Education, [Multi-academy trusts: good practice guidance and expectations for growth](#), December 2016

47 Department for Education, [Governance handbook](#), January 2017

48 [Governance handbook](#), January 2017

The role of parents and the local community in governance

43. *Educational Excellence Everywhere* stated “we will expect all governing boards to focus on seeking people with the right skills for governance, and so we will no longer require academy trusts to reserve places for elected parents on governing boards”.⁴⁹ Six months later, and after a considerable amount of criticism from the sector, the new Secretary of State announced that the Government would not pursue this proposal.⁵⁰ In September, the Secretary of State told us: “I don’t think we should be saying MATs don’t need to have parents. Parent governors play a vital role actually.”⁵¹

44. Whilst the decision to remove parents from governing boards was abandoned, we heard from numerous sources that the means by which local communities can hold their trust to account is less clear than in maintained school structures. Professor Pam Stapleton and Dr Anne Stafford from the University of Manchester described downward accountability to parents and other local stakeholders as “diminished”.⁵²

It is unclear how local communities can get voice in a MAT. There is an elongated hierarchical structure between the local community of one academy, and the national MAT executive level.⁵³

45. During our inquiry we heard from several parent groups through written evidence and our engagement event.⁵⁴ Aside from the formal role of the parent governor, parents told us that they feel powerless to engage with chains whose central administration can be many miles from their local school. The newly-formed Rescue Our Schools organisation wrote:

MATs disengage schools, parents and stakeholders from their communities [...] The MAT model leads to dominant chains, spread across diverse areas of the country and large schools. Many families do not want these for their children.⁵⁵

46. We were told by parents that MATs are not sufficiently accountable to their local community and they feel disconnected from decision making at trustee board level. There is too much emphasis on ‘upward’ accountability and not enough on local engagement.

47. Trusts must publish their scheme of delegation on their website and trustee boards have a duty to be clear with local governing boards that the decision-making responsibilities are held by the Board of Trustees in a MAT, and not at a local level. MATs should demonstrate a sincere commitment to outreach and engagement with the local community.

49 Department for Education, *Educational Excellence Everywhere*, [Cm 9230](#), March 2016, p 51

50 Oral evidence taken on 14 September 2016, HC (2016–17) 196, Q259

51 HC (2016–17) 196, Q259

52 Professor Pam Stapleton and Dr Anne Stafford ([MAT 37](#)) para 4.1

53 ([MAT 37](#)) para 4.1

54 See Annex 1

55 Rescue Our Schools ([MAT 55](#))

4 The expansion and development of the multi-academy trust model

48. We heard throughout our inquiry that successful MATs are those which have expanded slowly and adopted either a regional cluster model or based themselves in just one region. Ark, one of the highest performing trusts, told us that “working in clusters of schools across four regions allows us to share resources and to take advantage of economies of scale”.⁵⁶ They also said that their regional model allows them to “support peer to peer learning” and staff development.⁵⁷

49. Professor Merryn Hutchings, Emeritus Professor, Institute for Policy Studies in Education, London Metropolitan University, told us that her research with The Sutton Trust showed that trusts “that are doing well have tended to have had slow expansion in a relatively limited geographical region”.⁵⁸

50. Several witnesses were critical of the Department’s initial encouragement for “speedy growth” of MATs. Lucy Heller, Chief Executive of ARK, told us:

I think the Department was certainly encouraging speedy growth. It seemed to me that when you asked the question about whether there is a link between school performance and speed of MAT growth, the answer is obviously yes.⁵⁹

51. E-Act’s Chief Executive David Moran admitted that his trust had suffered from focusing on taking on too many schools too quickly. This led to E-Act being the first MAT to go through the re-brokerage process, losing ten schools:

I think the speed of growth with a lack of strategy, a lack of a school improvement vision, a lack of an understanding of where the schools are, and a lack of transparent governance structures and systems and processes all combined to see the historic failure that was prevalent at E-ACT three years ago.⁶⁰

52. We asked Sir David Carter whether he thought MATs have been allowed to expand too rapidly across too wide a geographical area.⁶¹ He responded:

Yes, I do, and I think in some cases that has been a factor in underperformance—not in every one. As I said before, I think we need to be careful that we do not equate size and rapid growth with failure. I think there are examples where you can do that.⁶²

56 Ark ([MAT 43](#)) para 2

57 ([MAT 43](#)) para 10

58 Q244

59 Q134

60 Q132

61 Q32

62 At a Westminster Education Forum event on 19 October 2016 Sir David said: “there’s this myth in the system that says something like this. It says some of our early multi-academy trusts grew too fast too soon and that’s why they failed. That’s a myth because it’s not true. Yes some of them did grow quite quick but because they grew quickly wasn’t why they failed”.

53. Sir Michael Wilshaw described this attitude towards MAT expansion as “pile them high, sell them cheap. Let’s empire build rather than have the capacity to improve these schools”.⁶³

Box 1: Case study: Eastbrook Primary Academy

As part of our inquiry we visited Eastbrook Primary Academy in Southwick, West Sussex on 1 November. The school converted to academy status in 2013 after receiving an ‘inadequate’ Ofsted rating. On conversion it joined Reach2 MAT, the country’s largest primary only trust. In September 2015 the school received an ‘outstanding’ rating from Ofsted.

During the visit we met Sir Steve Lancashire, Chief Executive of Reach2, Headteacher Julia Sherlock, Chair of Governors Dr Louise Askew and teaching staff.

Reach2 operates 52 primary academies across England. They are based in regional clusters. Sir Steve told us in oral evidence:

Our schools are in regional clusters, and that is very important because they can collaborate with each other, but it also means that we can absolutely build a team around them to make the kind of intervention that we would need to.⁶⁴

During our visit we heard how staff from Eastbrook visit other Reach2 academies in their region to share best practice and also conduct mock inspections to learn from each other.

Reach2 has also developed strong regional governance structures. A three tier structure includes the Reach Academy Trust Board, Regional Boards and Local Governing Bodies. During our visit we talked about the school’s relationship with their local community and the emphasis the school puts on developing strong relationship with parents. They told us the importance of creating trust between the school and parents, especially during the academy conversion process.

We were particularly impressed with the strength of leadership in the school, particularly during their conversion to academy status and during the process of joining Reach2. The trust has a strong focus on continuous professional development (CPD) for its teachers and runs programmes centrally for academies in its network. We also heard how staff move across the trust, offering greater career development opportunities.

54. In its early enthusiasm for MATs, the Government encouraged trusts to expand too quickly over too large geographical regions. Schools which operate within close proximity to one another are best able to share resources and expertise and subsequently can most successfully take advantage of being part of a MAT.

63 Q20

64 Q129

Future expansion of MATs

55. In oral evidence in June 2016 Sir David Carter committed to the expansion of the “strongest” MATs.⁶⁵ In a prior speech to the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) conference in March 2016 he stated that 1,000 new MATs will be created by 2020.⁶⁶ Lord Nash was more reserved in his predictions in November, but speculated that in 25 years’ time, there may be a MAT with “hundreds of schools in it”.⁶⁷

We now have 500 MATs of between three and 10 schools, and over the next few years many of those will be expanding to maybe double figures, 15 schools.⁶⁸

56. Several research reports over the last year have indicated that expansion on this level is not backed up by evidence that MATs are a successful route to school improvement. The Education Policy Institute’s (EPI) report *School performance in multi-academy trusts and local authorities–2015* presented a mixed picture of the overall performance of MATs.⁶⁹ The report stated:

There are undoubtedly high-performing multi-academy trusts that are sustaining high rates of progress for their pupils [...] but the picture is far from consistent and joining a trust is not guaranteed to drive improvement.⁷⁰

57. The EPI’s report compared the performance of pupils in MATs with those in local authority schools across the country. It found that “taken in aggregate there is not substantial or consistent evidence for MATs being more effective than local authorities or vice versa”. Natalie Perera, EPI’s Executive Director, cast doubt on Sir David’s forecast of a thousand MATs by 2020. She said that until we know what makes a strong and effective MAT we cannot say whether such figures are robust or realistic.⁷¹

58. This lack of evidence for expansion was also discussed by Professor Toby Greany and Dr Melanie Ehren.⁷² They stated that there is “no robust evidence that MATs secure consistent or sustained impact”.⁷³ They also described the problem of “designing in flight” which a rapid pace of expansion leads to and said this can create incoherence, uncertainty and risk.⁷⁴

65 Q9

66 [‘1,000 new multi-academy trusts needed by 2020, says national schools commissioners’](#), Schools Week, 11 March 2016

67 Q430

68 Q382

69 Education Policy Institute, *‘School performance in multi-academy trusts and local authorities-2015’* (July 2016)

70 [‘School performance in multi-academy trusts and local authorities-2015’](#) (July 2016), p 32

71 Q255

72 Professor Toby Greany and Dr Melanie Ehren, UCL Institute of Education ([MAT 10](#))

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.

The role of local authorities

59. As more schools academise and join or create MATs, local authorities will play a less significant role in the school system. *Educational Excellence Everywhere* outlined three areas where local authorities will continue to play a role in local education provision:⁷⁵

- (1) **Ensuring every child has a school place.** The Government will continue to fund councils to manage school admissions and school transport;
- (2) **Ensuring the needs of vulnerable pupils are met.** This includes provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND);
- (3) **Acting as champions for all parents and families.** Local authorities should continue to support parents and students going through the admissions process and where necessary discuss underperformance with the RSC.

60. We asked the Secretary of State in September what she saw as the role for local authorities as MATs increase in number and size:

For local authorities, we have also finally seen the regional schools commissioners now take their place within this structure [...] Local authorities can play a role; it is making sure that they have the right role and it is making sure that local authorities, regional schools commissioners, MATs, headteacher boards, everybody has a clear sense of where they fit into this picture, what their particular role is and also how it relates to the other people in the schools ecosystem around them, if I can call it that.⁷⁶

61. The capacity for local authorities to fulfil the duties outlined in the white paper was questioned by Russell Hobby, General Secretary of the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT). He said:

That would seem to be a very sensible role for the local authority to fulfil as a champion of the most vulnerable children in their area, but as previous speakers have said, you have to give them the powers to match their responsibilities. That means powers across maintained and academy schools so that if they need to direct an academy to increase its places or to accept children with SEN needs, they can do so.⁷⁷

62. On the same panel Emma Knights said she feared that the system risked “haemorrhaging expertise” as those employed by local authorities leave the sector.⁷⁸ She also highlighted the risks to inter-agency working within local authorities which could particularly impact vulnerable children and young people.⁷⁹ This valuable part of the local authority remit was recognised by Oasis in their evidence:

The services currently provided by LAs that our academies, and the wider education sector, benefit from are numerous and multifaceted. For

75 Department for Education, *Educational Excellence Everywhere*, Cm 9230, March 2016, p 69

76 Oral evidence taken on 14 September 2016, HC (2016–17) 196, Q249

77 Q205

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid.

example, OCL does not currently have the resource to provide education psychologists or specialist SEN provision, or the ability to provide the multi-agency support necessary for vulnerable children.⁸⁰

63. Allowing local authorities to set up their own MATs has been suggested and several areas have explored this possibility. Barnsley Council published a paper which suggested that they may establish their own MAT. The document is reported as saying:

The council may also want to consider the option of establishing its own multi-academy trust, and the benefits and risks of that option in relation to the education outcomes, relationship with schools, viability and sustainability.⁸¹

64. It is not yet clear under what circumstances or arrangements a council might establish a trust. The RSCs we heard from didn't shed any further light on this but were positive about their relationship with the local authorities they work with.

I cannot comment on everybody's, but I have cited Leicestershire, for example, where we worked incredibly closely with the local authority in terms of bringing schools together in successful clusters to form MATs, very much utilising the knowledge of the local authority in relation to the particular strengths of leadership that are there.⁸²

65. Jennifer Bexon-Smith commented on the impact which the "political complexion of the local authority" can have on their relationship.⁸³ She told us that in the "vast majority" of cases she has a positive relationship but that "where they sit" can have an impact.⁸⁴

66. The following quote from *Educational Excellence Everywhere* implies that individuals from local authorities may be encouraged to use their expertise to set up MATs:

To retain expertise in the system and ensure children continue to benefit from the best talent in local authorities, we expect that some individuals working in local authority teams will leave to set up new trusts or join existing ones and become academy sponsors.⁸⁵

67. When we asked Nicky Morgan about the white paper's content she told us that "we are absolutely open to the opportunities offered by those working in local authorities with schools to set up trusts".⁸⁶

68. There remains a high degree of uncertainty around the effectiveness of MATs and there is not yet the evidence to prove that large scale expansion would significantly improve the school landscape. Only time will tell whether multi-academy trusts are more successful than local authorities at creating and supporting high-performing schools and tackling underperformance.

80 Oasis Community Learning ([MAT 35](#)) para 12

81 "[Barnsley Council may consider running its own group of academies](#)", Yorkshire Post, 28 June 2016

82 Q336

83 Q305

84 Q305

85 Department for Education, *Educational Excellence Everywhere*, [Cm 9230](#), March 2016, p 83

86 Oral evidence taken on 27 April 2016, HC (2015–16) 402, Q102

69. *The Government must clearly define the future role of local authorities, particularly in areas with high numbers of academies. The current uncertainty about their place in the school system is not sustainable and making their role clear should be a priority for the Secretary of State. Their relationship with RSCs must also form a part of this and formal protocols between local authorities and the RSC structure should be established.*

70. *If the Government is to pursue the goal of further academisation, it will need to partner with and use the expertise of local authorities. Local authorities with a track record of strong educational performance should be allowed to use the expertise within their education departments to create MATs.*

EFA and DfE capacity to deliver reform

71. The transfer of schools from local authority control to MATs has placed pressure on the resources of the DfE and the EFA. Several witnesses cast doubt on the EFA's ability to manage a significant expansion in the number of trusts. Academies Enterprise Trust (AET) concluded its written evidence by saying "we have some concerns over the role of the EFA as funder, controller and charity regulator".⁸⁷

72. Professor Pam Stapleton and Dr Anne Stafford described the EFA's resources as "very limited" and called their monitoring systems "light touch".⁸⁸ They also spoke of the reliance of the EFA on whistleblowers "to signal any concerns about financial probity and management".⁸⁹ NASUWT also included concerns about the role of whistleblowers in their submission:

In many cases, concerns about financial impropriety by MATs have only been addressed by the EFA once issues were brought to its attention by whistleblowers.⁹⁰

73. In 2014 the National Audit Office (NAO) published a report into related-party transactions at the Durand Academy Trust.⁹¹ The NAO reported:

The Agency's [EFA] judgement on whether the disclosed related party transactions present a risk to public funds is often founded on other sources of information, such as whistleblowing reports or the Agency's own register of academies of national concern. The Agency does not routinely follow-up with academies to ensure that related party transactions have been disclosed nor do they have the capacity to be able to carry out these checks. It does carry out a more detailed review at academy trusts where there is a cause for concern.

74. **A significant expansion of MATs will place further pressures on the financial oversight capabilities of the Department and the Education Funding Agency. It is far from clear that the Department or EFA can cope with this degree of growth over the next five or six years.**

87 Academies Enterprise Trust ([MAT 38](#)) para 2.28

88 Professor Pam Stapleton and Dr Anne Stafford ([MAT 37](#)) paras 3.3–3.4

89 ([MAT 37](#)) para 3.4

90 NASUWT ([MAT 31](#)) para 15

91 National Audit Office, *Investigation into the Education Funding Agency's oversight of related party transactions at Durand Academy*, [HC 782](#), November 2014

75. *The Department and EFA should outline the expected increase in MATs over the next five or six year planning period, and the likely resource implications that will result. Doing so would help allay our concerns that there is insufficient planning and resources to cope with impending developments.*

76. Financial management in trusts has featured in this inquiry and in our ongoing work on financial management at the DfE. Twenty-five financial notices to improve were published to academy trusts in 2016, compared to seven notices in 2015.⁹² More notices were issued in 2016 than in any other since notices were first issued in 2012. The data also shows that 25 schools, in seven trusts, have been re-brokered due to financial mismanagement. Trusts which are issued with notices have restrictions placed on their spending and must meet certain conditions to avoid their funding being stopped.

77. During our session on financial management with Sir Amyas Morse, Comptroller and Auditor General, he made the following comments on the nature of an academy system where schools are given a high level of autonomy:

It is fair to say if you want something that is going to be a very free system, if I can call it that—I am trying to use that for shorthand—what you are going to have to deal with is more turbulence because there are so many individual decision points and schools that can set their own style that some of them are inevitably going to do things that you might, as a parliamentarian, think, “It is not illegal but we do not like the look of it very much”. It goes with the nature of the system. There are probably benefits to that system. I am not saying that is only the disbenefits. There are benefits as well. I think it is a feature. Then you have to determine what level of oversight works with that. There is a lot of trial and error involved.⁹³

78. *Despite a range of proactive and reactive measures taken by EFA to promote strong financial management in academy trusts, the Department has a long way to go in order to demonstrate that public money disbursed to academies is being used effectively.*

Primary schools

79. In March 2016 although 75% of primary academies were part of a MAT,⁹⁴ 82% of primaries remained under local authority control.⁹⁵ The majority of MATs now include some primary provision.⁹⁶ Two-fifths of trusts have no mix of phases and are entirely primary, secondary or special provision.⁹⁷

80. Small primary schools, particularly those in rural locations, are especially vulnerable to isolation as MATs spread in size and number. Witnesses told us that there is little financial incentive for these schools to academise and join MATs as the process can put a “huge drain” on the financial resources of a small primary school.⁹⁸

92 Department for Education, ‘[Academies financial notices to improve](#)’, accessed 11 January 2017

93 Oral evidence taken on 25 October 2016, HC (2016–17) 203, Q96

94 Department for Education ([MAT 20](#)) para 31

95 NFER ([MAT 34](#)) para 6

96 Education Policy Institute ([MAT 39](#)) para 17 (formerly known as Centre Forum)

97 ([MAT 39](#)) para 18

98 Professor Pam Stapleton and Dr Anne Stafford ([MAT 37](#)) para 1.4

81. The Church of England education office told us that small primary schools are significantly less likely to join MATs:

It is also the case that secondary schools and larger primaries have been more likely to establish or join MATs while smaller schools (those with less than 100 pupils and particularly those with less than 50 pupils) have either been seen as not sufficiently attractive in financial terms to MAT or potential MAT leaders or are themselves less interested in MAT structures.⁹⁹

82. The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) commented that there is greater need for local authority support in the primary sector:

A reliance on existing local authority support structures may be one of the reasons fewer primary schools have chosen to convert to academy status than secondaries. It may also explain why the proportion of primary academies that are not part of a MAT is smaller than the proportion of secondary academies that are not part of a MAT.¹⁰⁰

83. We asked several witnesses whether they thought trusts operate better with a ‘vertical’ structure which includes primary and secondary provision, or ‘horizontal’ with just one type of school. Janet Renou, RSC for the North of England, told us that she prefers a “family” approach where MATs include schools from primary to sixth-form.¹⁰¹ Lord Nash said he believes both structures work but that “as we have only about 20% of primaries currently in academies, we will see increasingly more primaries come together in horizontal integration”.¹⁰²

84. Small, rural primary schools are vulnerable as trusts take on more schools and the MAT model is currently not attractive to them. There is a risk that the primary sector will be left behind as secondary schools academise and join or form MATs.

Sponsor capacity and quality

85. As well as low numbers of primaries in trusts in rural areas, there are also fewer sponsors in areas such as Northumberland, North Yorkshire and Cumbria.¹⁰³ Chapter 5 of *Educational Excellence Everywhere*, spoke of the need for “high quality sponsors, where they are needed.”¹⁰⁴

We will ensure national coverage of high quality sponsors, building on the growth of great leadership in recent years from outstanding schools spreading their reach and support through MATs.¹⁰⁵

86. In order to build sponsor capacity the white paper says it will recruit more sponsors from business, charity and philanthropy and support existing trusts and sponsors to expand in a particular region.¹⁰⁶ The white paper also refers to the Northern Sponsor

99 Church of England Education Office ([MAT 48](#)) para 3.4

100 NFER ([MAT 34](#)) para 8

101 Q333

102 Q432

103 Q359

104 Department for Education, *Educational Excellence Everywhere*, [Cm 9230](#), March 2016, p 80

105 [Cm 9230](#), March 2016, p 81

106 *ibid*, p 83

Fund “a targeted intervention to build new clusters of sponsors in the north of England, particularly in areas without any high-performing sponsors at the moment”.¹⁰⁷ The Government has also created the regional academy growth fund to support trusts to grow.¹⁰⁸

87. Lucy Heller commented on the disparity between sponsor capacity in London and rural areas:

It is not just about where the MAT has capacity but, equally, what the capacity is in that area. I am conscious that in London, for instance, there is a huge wealth of capacity of MATs who have the capacity, ability and desire to deliver school improvement. If you are looking particularly in rural areas and along the coast, there is much less of that, so I think in some cases the RSCs may simply be saying they have to work with what is there.¹⁰⁹

88. This was acknowledged by the RSCs we heard from. Rebecca Clark spoke of the challenges in her region of “finding solutions to build capacity on the reaches of Exmoor” compared to building capacity in Bristol.¹¹⁰

89. There were also concerns from several witnesses over the quality of new and existing sponsors. Professor Hutchings expressed doubts over the rigour of the DfE’s vetting process for new sponsors. She said:

The record of the Government in accepting new sponsors and saying, “Yes, you can be a sponsor”, has been that most have been accepted. There does not seem to have been a very rigorous vetting process, and yet we need the new sponsors to hit the ground running.¹¹¹

90. In January 2017 *Schools Week* reported that 57 sponsors had at different times been put on the Government’s ‘pause list’ and instructed not to take on any more schools.¹¹² Worryingly some of these trusts have “ducked the ban” and taken more schools on.¹¹³ Ofsted has recently given poor Ofsted ratings to academies in several high profile trusts. In January WCAT, a beneficiary of the Northern Sponsor Fund, had two schools rated ‘inadequate’ by Ofsted.

91. ***RSCs are struggling to find or expand existing sponsors in rural areas of the country. There is a risk that this scarcity leads to the appointment of sponsors without a quality track record. The Department must prioritise support and funding to trusts which take on struggling schools in such areas. They must also focus on quality when finding and vetting new sponsors across the country. The Government should investigate any claims of trusts flouting bans on expansion.***

107 Ibid.

108 Department for Education, ‘[Regional academy growth fund](#)’, accessed 16 January 2017

109 Q186

110 Q348

111 Q255

112 Schools Week, ‘[Revealed: ‘Paused’ academy trusts are ducking their ban](#)’, 20 January 2017

113 ‘[Revealed: ‘Paused’ academy trusts are ducking their ban](#)’; this is a claim which the Committee has not taken evidence on.

5 The performance of multi-academy trusts

92. As the previous chapter detailed, the overall picture of MATs performance in England is mixed. The Sutton Trust's most recent Chain Effects report revealed that several chains have failed to improve over a significant period of time. In their evidence they told us:

Our evidence suggests a mixed picture [...] the best academy chains are having a transformational impact on pupils' life chances, but others have seriously underperformed and have expanded too rapidly.¹¹⁴

93. The Sutton Trust's research found that a number of trusts have struggled to improve their results over the past three years.¹¹⁵ In contrast a similar sized group of trusts performed consistently above average over the past three years. This group includes Ark and Harris Federation, which are frequently referred to by Government Ministers as successful trusts.¹¹⁶

94. In January the Government released their own MAT league tables based on 2016 exam results.¹¹⁷ This showed that two thirds of MATs had Progress 8 scores that were below average across the secondary schools in their trust. Just over half of those (51%) performed "significantly below" average. Some of the largest trusts did particularly badly, including E-Act and AET. MATs did better at Key Stage 2 with over half achieving above average progress in writing and maths.

95. The EPI's study of MATs performance, compared to local authorities, showed that being part of a MAT does not necessarily lead to better results.¹¹⁸ Natalie Perera, EPI's Executive Director, told us:

What we see from the evidence of academy performance, be that individual types of academies or MATs, is that it is quite clear that they are not a silver bullet to raising standards.¹¹⁹

96. **Since the launch of our inquiry, several organisations and the Government have published analysis of the performance of trusts. All of these reports show a mixed picture in terms of the performance of MATs. They show that some MATs are delivering excellent results and using the MAT model to effectively drive improvement. However, a significant number of MATs are failing to improve year on year and consistently appear at the bottom of league tables.**

114 The Sutton Trust ([MAT 12](#))

115 The Sutton Trust, [Chain Effects 2016](#) (July 2016), p 57

116 [Chain Effects 2016](#), p 57

117 Department for Education, Experimental Statistics: Multi-academy trust performance measures: England, 2015 to 2016, [SFR 02/2017](#), January 2017

118 Education Policy Institute, [School performance in multi-academy trusts and local authorities-2015](#) (July 2016)

119 Q227

The re-brokering of schools within MATs

97. Evidence from the DfE described the process by which underperforming schools could be transferred to an alternative MAT:

Where MATs are on track to deal with underperformance they should be supported to do so. The default approach to tackling chronic underperformance will continue to be to broker the school into an alternative MAT, where school leaders with a track record of success can apply proven models to improve performance.¹²⁰

98. A written answer to a parliamentary question in June 2016 revealed that of the 277 academies rated as inadequate from 2010 to 2015, just 84 have been re-brokered.¹²¹ In 70% of cases the DfE has failed to remove a failing school from its chain. In January 2017, Lord Nash wrote to us with updated figures on re-brokering.

As at 4 January 2017 there were 41 academies in the process of being re-brokered. Of these, 31 are as a result of intervention action on the part of the Regional School Commissioner (RSC). The rest involve instances such as a single academy trust seeking to join or set up a multi academy trust; or a sponsor deciding to hand back an academy because it no longer has the capacity to run it or wants to wind down the trust.¹²²

99. David Moran from E-Act was able to give us a first-hand account of the re-brokering of schools from his trust:¹²³

I think the timing of rebrokerage is critical. The impact on the culture within the organisation during that rebrokerage period was difficult at the school level for individual teachers, principals and parents. There was the sense of not knowing what was happening and who they were going to, and there was the question of the sensible timing of when that information is shared and how that process happens. In my mind, it makes sense for any type of a rebrokerage to happen at the beginning or end of an academic and financial year.¹²⁴

100. As well as highlighting the importance of timing he, and other witnesses, spoke of the importance of due diligence. Lucy Heller, Chief Executive of Ark, was critical of the Department's focus on a "swift transfer" from one school to another.¹²⁵ Instead of calling it re-brokerage she said it should be named "reacademisation" to reflect the process and financial burden on trusts.¹²⁶

The difficulty with academies is that it is treated simply as a transfer and there is little or no funding available to support that. At the moment, it

120 Department for Education ([MAT 20](#)) para 25

121 [PQ 38244](#) [on Academies: Standards], 6 June 2016

122 Department for Education ([MAT 64](#)) para 2

123 Q166

124 Q170

125 Q174

126 *Ibid.*

is more attractive for MATs to take on maintained schools rather than academies that have fallen into difficulties, and it seems illogical for that to be the case.¹²⁷

101. Professor Hutchings told us that the re-brokerage process is still an unknown and that we have little evidence on how successful re-brokering is for under-performing schools.¹²⁸ She expressed particular concern for schools which are “constantly re-brokered”.¹²⁹

102. There is a growing risk that schools which need to be re-brokered multiple times have become ‘untouchable’. These are schools which have received poor Ofsted ratings and/or are in financial trouble. There have been several recent media reports of trusts refusing to sponsor schools for this reason. An article in *TES* in November reported that changes to funding agreements means that trusts can no longer pull out of sponsoring schools which risk dragging the entire chain into insolvency.¹³⁰ This is leading to a growth in ‘untouchable’ schools and trusts taking due diligence a lot more seriously.

103. *We are concerned by the growth of ‘untouchable’ schools and the length of time it is taking for some schools to be re-brokered. The Government should give greater support for schools which are deemed unattractive to sponsors and play a more active role in re-brokering through RSCs.*

MAT ‘growth checks’

104. During the course of the inquiry the DfE have been developing ‘growth checks’ which are intended to assess whether a MAT should be allowed to take on more schools. In June, Sir David Carter outlined these checks.¹³¹ He proposed that five checks should be carried out by the RSCs in their region:

I am going to introduce a health check on five key areas. The five tests will be standards and track record, people and leadership, governance capacity, financial sustainability and management of risk.¹³²

105. In September the Department submitted written evidence to this inquiry outlining their plans for the checks:

Further work to support the sustainable growth of MATs includes the development of a ‘MAT growth check’. The intention is that this proposal will offer trusts the option to undergo a ‘health check review’ as they approach key growth phases; and will look beyond school-by-school growth to assess the MAT’s capacity to grow successfully and take responsibility for a number of schools.¹³³

127 Ibid.

128 Q256

129 Ibid.

130 “Untouchables: the schools that MATs won’t go near” *TES*, 25 November 2016, p 8–9

131 Q17

132 Ibid.

133 Department for Education ([MAT 59](#)) para 18

106. The Department explained that they are currently “piloting this proposal through a series of pathfinders”.¹³⁴ In December Lord Nash confirmed that there are currently 30 pilots of these checks.¹³⁵ Jennifer Bexon-Smith, RSC for East Midlands and the Humber, told us that the checks “will come into being for all trusts from 2017”.¹³⁶

As far as I understand in terms of the process there will be an experienced CEO, a finance director, a board member and a member of the trust that is being inspected, and they will have a series of five areas that they will focus on. There will be structured questions, but it will be very much about fitness for purpose to grow. It is not a pass or a fail; it is about identifying where there may be potential issues that need to be addressed before that trust is ready to go to the next stage of development.¹³⁷

107. We welcome the introduction of a MAT ‘growth check’ and look forward to the Department publishing further details on what measures will be part of the check and the process by which the check will be used. The Government must place tight restrictions on the growth of MATs and use their ‘growth check’ to ensure that MATs are only permitted to take on more schools when they have the capacity to grow successfully.

Evidence on high-performing MATs

108. Many witnesses told us that the Department should be commissioning independent, robust research into what the most successful trusts are doing.

109. In its written evidence NFER said that “further research needs to be conducted in order to understand the characteristics, structures and behaviours of high performing MATs”.¹³⁸ Professor Hutchings told us that we really need research on what makes a “good MAT”.¹³⁹ Similarly the NGA’s evidence advised that the Government should conduct research specifically into “the maximum effective size and geographical spread of a MAT.”¹⁴⁰ It is notable that such calls have been made over several years from many sources, seeking an evidence-based approach to the development of MATs.¹⁴¹

110. Existing research is also challenged by the speed of change. As Karen Wespieser, Senior Research Manager at NFER, told us:

I think the plans to expand MATs is racing ahead of the evidence and as researchers we are trying to keep up. In most cases, in terms of the research evidence, the systems have not been in place long enough to say what works.¹⁴²

111. Shortly after Lord Nash gave evidence to us the DfE released ‘Multi-academy trusts: good practice guidance and expectations for growth’.¹⁴³ The document includes “10 characteristics of governance in effective MATs”, “10 ways effective academy trusts

134 (MAT 59) para 20

135 Q395

136 Q318

137 Q320

138 National Foundation for Educational Research (MAT 34) para 5

139 Q244

140 National Governors’ Association (MAT 44)

141 The Academies Commission, ‘*Unleashing greatness*’, January 2013

142 Q224

143 Department for Education, [Multi-academy trusts: good practice guidance and expectations for growth](#), December 2016

lead school improvement” and “10 ways effective MATs make sure they have a strong team”. This is a useful document for schools considering joining a MAT or existing MATs developing their trust. Nevertheless it does not appear to be based on rigorous empirical research.

112. *We believe the Department’s recent ‘good practice guidance and expectations for growth’ document does not provide a solid enough evidence base on the characteristics of successful trusts. The Government should commission and publish independent, robust research on what the highest performing MATs are doing.*

The sharing of best practice between trusts

113. The Government has stated that its intention is for schools to use the MAT model to share best practice and expertise. The Government’s white paper anticipated that:

In the future, there will be more MATs spreading best practice across the schools system and by joining, forming, expanding or leading MATs, the best leaders, who have already proven their success, ability and skills, can play a greater role in the system and spread success more widely to benefit more children.¹⁴⁴

114. Several of the larger MATs who submitted evidence spoke of the importance of school to school support. Oasis wrote that their academies “participate in a school to school led improvement model and therefore work collaboratively with academies within the MAT regionally and nationally, schools in their locality and the Local Authority (LA) to share best practice and accomplish improvement through partnership”.¹⁴⁵ Dr Ehren and Professor Greany cited evidence which suggests that this type of peer support between high and low achieving schools can have benefits for the “donor as well as the recipient”.¹⁴⁶

115. Lord Nash informed us that the Government was “developing the concept of mentoring MATs”.¹⁴⁷ This will involve well-established MATs mentoring newer trusts and sharing expertise with them.

116. Recent performance tables show a significant difference in the attainment of trusts, with a small group of trusts consistently producing excellent results for their students. These trusts should be encouraged to share best practice and use their expertise to support the MATs which are consistently under-performing. We are encouraged to hear that the Government is developing “mentoring MATs” and look forward to seeing more details of this programme.

144 Department for Education, *Educational Excellence Everywhere*, Cm 9230, March 2016, p 58

145 Oasis Community Learning ([MAT 35](#)) para 7

146 Professor Toby Greany and Dr Melanie Ehren, UCL Institute of Education ([MAT 10](#))

147 Q423

Conclusions and recommendations

1. There have been several changes to academy policy over the last year which have caused instability and uncertainty in the sector. Evidence we heard from Lord Nash indicated that the Government expects that in five to six a years a “tipping point” will be reached where most schools have converted and joined a MAT. As trusts grow in size and number we urge the Government only to promote expansion that prioritises performance. (Paragraph 12)

Accountability and inspection of multi-academy trusts

2. There is a gap in assessing MATs which neither Ofsted nor RSCs presently fulfil. The current situation of Ofsted conducting ‘batched inspections’ is not sustainable or sufficient as MATs expand over the next five to six years. It is not a formal inspection or accountability process and does not necessarily lead to intervention from Ofsted or the Department. (Paragraph 27)
3. Ofsted needs a new framework for MAT inspections and should develop the resources, skills and powers to conduct full inspections of trusts. (Paragraph 28)
4. Two previous Committee reports have recommended that the Government clarify the division of responsibilities between RSCs and Ofsted in a way that is comprehensible to schools and parents. There remains too much overlap between the roles of Ofsted and RSCs. (Paragraph 37)
5. The Government should follow our previous recommendation and align Ofsted and RSC regions. There is also more work to be done to clarify the distinction between Ofsted inspections and RSC visits. (Paragraph 38)
6. While we welcome the Government’s recent document which set out examples of best practice in governance, there is still significant confusion about the move to boards of trustees being the accountable bodies for MATs. This move has not been communicated well enough by the Department and has led schools to join or start trusts without full knowledge of how their governance structures will change. The Department must improve and extend the advice and guidance they offer. (Paragraph 42)
7. We were told by parents that MATs are not sufficiently accountable to their local community and they feel disconnected from decision making at trustee board level. There is too much emphasis on ‘upward’ accountability and not enough on local engagement. (Paragraph 46)
8. Trusts must publish their scheme of delegation on their website and trustee boards have a duty to be clear with local governing boards that the decision-making responsibilities are held by the Board of Trustees in a MAT, and not at a local level. MATs should demonstrate a sincere commitment to outreach and engagement with the local community. (Paragraph 47)

The expansion and development of the multi-academy trust model

9. In its early enthusiasm for MATs, the Government encouraged trusts to expand too quickly over too large geographical regions. Schools which operate within close proximity to one another are best able to share resources and expertise and subsequently can most successfully take advantage of being part of a MAT. (Paragraph 54)
10. There remains a high degree of uncertainty around the effectiveness of MATs and there is not yet the evidence to prove that large scale expansion would significantly improve the school landscape. Only time will tell whether multi-academy trusts are more successful than local authorities at creating and supporting high-performing schools and tackling underperformance. (Paragraph 68)
11. The Government must clearly define the future role of local authorities, particularly in areas with high numbers of academies. The current uncertainty about their place in the school system is not sustainable and making their role clear should be a priority for the Secretary of State. Their relationship with RSCs must also form a part of this and formal protocols between local authorities and the RSC structure should be established. (Paragraph 69)
12. If the Government is to pursue the goal of further academisation, it will need to partner with and use the expertise of local authorities. Local authorities with a track record of strong educational performance should be allowed to use the expertise within their education departments to create MATs. (Paragraph 70)
13. A significant expansion of MATs will place further pressures on the financial oversight capabilities of the Department and the Education Funding Agency. It is far from clear that the Department or EFA can cope with this degree of growth over the next five or six years. (Paragraph 74)
14. The Department and EFA should outline the expected increase in MATs over the next five or six year planning period, and the likely resource implications that will result. Doing so would help allay our concerns that there is insufficient planning and resources to cope with impending developments. (Paragraph 75)
15. Despite a range of proactive and reactive measures taken by EFA to promote strong financial management in academy trusts, the Department has a long way to go in order to demonstrate that public money disbursed to academies is being used effectively. (Paragraph 78)
16. Small, rural primary schools are vulnerable as trusts take on more schools and the MAT model is currently not attractive to them. There is a risk that the primary sector will be left behind as secondary schools academise and join or form MATs. (Paragraph 84)
17. RSCs are struggling to find or expand existing sponsors in rural areas of the country. There is a risk that this scarcity leads to the appointment of sponsors without a quality track record. The Department must prioritise support and funding to trusts

which take on struggling schools in such areas. They must also focus on quality when finding and vetting new sponsors across the country. The Government should investigate any claims of trusts flouting bans on expansion. (Paragraph 91)

The performance of multi-academy trusts

18. Since the launch of our inquiry, several organisations and the Government have published analysis of the performance of trusts. All of these reports show a mixed picture in terms of the performance of MATs. They show that some MATs are delivering excellent results and using the MAT model to effectively drive improvement. However, a significant number of MATs are failing to improve year on year and consistently appear at the bottom of league tables. (Paragraph 96)
19. We are concerned by the growth of ‘untouchable’ schools and the length of time it is taking for some schools to be re-brokered. The Government should give greater support for schools which are deemed unattractive to sponsors and play a more active role in re-brokering through RSCs. (Paragraph 103)
20. We welcome the introduction of a MAT ‘growth check’ and look forward to the Department publishing further details on what measures will be part of the check and the process by which the check will be used. The Government must place tight restrictions on the growth of MATs and use their ‘growth check’ to ensure that MATs are only permitted to take on more schools when they have the capacity to grow successfully. (Paragraph 107)
21. We believe the Department’s recent ‘good practice guidance and expectations for growth’ document does not provide a solid enough evidence base on the characteristics of successful trusts. The Government should commission and publish independent, robust research on what the highest performing MATs are doing. (Paragraph 112)
22. Recent performance tables show a significant difference in the attainment of trusts, with a small group of trusts consistently producing excellent results for their students. These trusts should be encouraged to share best practice and use their expertise to support the MATs which are consistently under-performing. We are encouraged to hear that the Government is developing “mentoring MATs” and look forward to seeing more details of this programme. (Paragraph 116)

Annex 1: Parental engagement event

On 24 October we held an informal engagement event with parents. The event was advertised through our website, social media and targeted at parent groups. Attendees discussed topics within the scope of the inquiry with Committee members and staff.

The following is a summary of comments made during the event, divided into six topic sections. Direct quotes from attendees are included in italics.

Topic one: Regional School Commissioners

Several attendees did not know who RSCs were, even though they had been or were currently parent governors. They were also confused about how Ofsted and RSCs work together.

One attendee did not know how they could contact RSCs and another thought RSCs were only engaged with underperforming schools.

It would be good if parents had a shortlist of MATs to choose from but in reality the RSC often decides which MAT the school will join when they are forced to become an academy.

The burden of RSCs is now very large and parents don't necessarily know what they do.

The information on RSCs is not necessarily provided but can be found if parents know where to look for it.

Parents are only concerned with RSCs if a school is doing badly. The question is do these parents know the role of the RSC. The answer is a resounding no.

Topic two: Parent governors

Several attendees said that the governance structure of their MAT was not fit for purpose and that local governing boards are too remote from the trustee board.

Parent governors are important, but don't get high up enough through the MAT governance structure to make real impact.

It can also be bad having parent governors who are not experienced enough or even competent.

Engagement is key and governors should have an engagement process including parent association, newsletter, website, etc. Communication is key.

Most parents don't understand the change in governance and some don't care.

Topic three: MATs relationship with their local community and parents

There was some concern that the larger MATs are too far removed from parents in the local area.

With the absence of local authorities, parents felt that they needed to be more involved in the education process.

We need more systematic routes for parents to get involved at different levels of the education system - class, key stage, governance, MAT level. Parent forums are a good way of achieving this.

Barriers to engaging parents include: time, disadvantaged background, mystified by the education system and disincentives from other parents.

Engaging parents is hard work but it is vital that there is local oversight.

The impression is that academy authorities are “playing lip service”. Parents are given the chance to have their say but by then decisions have already been made.

Topic four: Joining and leaving MATs

Many attendees said that MATs have expanded too quickly and that schools have been coerced into joining without proper information.

One attendee’s school was in a state of limbo as the school had been ordered to become an academy but had not yet found a sponsor. The local authority was not involved and they said the RSC would not speak to parents. The parent was worried that the school would soon be unable to run as parents are pulling their children out of the school and teachers are leaving.

The lack of local authority involvement was also a cause for concern as MATs outsource certain departments, such as human resources.

Leaving a MAT seems impossible. Parents would not know how to go about this unless the MAT was failing.

Topic five: Leadership of MATs

Several parents remarked they did not know who the CEO of their child’s MAT was.

Some attendees felt that the senior leadership team was recruited to reflect the MAT’s ethos but they said this was not necessarily a bad thing, especially where schools were previously very poorly managed.

Ofsted should be able to inspect and assess MATs as a whole and not just as individual schools.

Representation at the local level is a token because the power actually lies at a higher level

Topic six: What do good MATs do?

Parents don’t always understand what makes a good MAT. Speed of growth is not necessarily something parents are aware of. If they don’t understand this it can make it difficult for them to engage.

Transparency is really important and MATs work well where the data is transparent and parents can make informed decisions based on it.

Genuine engagement means giving information to parents in a way that they can understand.

Formal Minutes

Wednesday 22 February 2017

Members present:

Neil Carmichael, in the Chair

Marion Fellows William Wragg

Lilian Greenwood

Draft Report (*Multi-academy trusts*) proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered that the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 116 read and agreed to.

Summary and annex agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Seventh Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134).

[Adjourned till Wednesday 1 March at 9am

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Wednesday 15 June 2016

Question number

Sir Michael Wilshaw, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills, Ofsted, and **Sir David Carter**, National Schools Commissioner, Department for Education [Q1–127](#)

Wednesday 13 July 2016

Sir Steve Lancashire, Chief Executive, REAch2 Academy Trust, **David Moran**, Chief Executive, E-ACT, **Lucy Heller**, Chief Executive, Ark, and **Barbara Daykin**, Executive Head Teacher, Little Mead Academy Trust [Q128–198](#)

Councillor Richard Watts, Vice-Chair of the Children and Young People Board, Local Government Association, **Emma Knights**, Chief Executive, National Governors' Association, **Chris Keates**, General Secretary, NASUWT, and **Russell Hobby**, General Secretary, National Association of Head Teachers [Q199–221](#)

Wednesday 7 September 2016

Dr Melanie Ehren, Reader in Educational Accountability and Improvement, UCL Institute of Education, **Professor Merryn Hutchings**, Emeritus Professor, Institute for Policy Studies in Education, London Metropolitan University, **Natalie Perera**, Executive Director, Education Policy Institute and **Karen Wespieser**, Senior Research Manager, National Foundation for Educational Research [Q222–262](#)

Paul Barber, Director, Catholic Education Service, **Reverend Steve Chalke**, Founder, Oasis Community Learning, **Andrew Copson**, Chief Executive, British Humanist Association, **Reverend Nigel Genders**, Chief Education Officer, Church of England Education Office, and **David Wilson**, Director, Freedom and Autonomy for Schools, National Association [Q263–301](#)

Wednesday 12 October 2016

Jennifer Bexon-Smith, Regional Schools Commissioner, East Midlands and the Humber, **Rebecca Clark**, Regional Schools Commissioner, South West England, and **Janet Renou**, Regional Schools Commissioner, North of England, Department for Education [Q302–377](#)

Wednesday 30 November 2016

Lord Nash, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, and **Peter Lauener**, Chief Executive, Education Funding Agency, Department for Education [Q378–433](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

MAT numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Academies Enterprise Trust ([MAT0038](#))
- 2 Academies Enterprise Trust ([MAT0051](#))
- 3 Academy Transformation Trust ([MAT0058](#))
- 4 Acorn Care and Education ([MAT0021](#))
- 5 Ark ([MAT0043](#))
- 6 Association of Colleges ([MAT0005](#))
- 7 Association of School and College Leaders ([MAT0028](#))
- 8 Association of Teachers and Lecturers ([MAT0013](#))
- 9 British Humanist Association ([MAT0029](#))
- 10 Catch22 ([MAT0024](#))
- 11 Catholic Education Service ([MAT0006](#))
- 12 CentreForum ([MAT0039](#))
- 13 Church of England Education Office ([MAT0048](#))
- 14 David Laver ([MAT0053](#))
- 15 Department for Education ([MAT0059](#))
- 16 Department for Education ([MAT0064](#))
- 17 Department for Education ([MAT0020](#))
- 18 Dr Mark T Gibson ([MAT0045](#))
- 19 Dulwich Hamlet Educational Trust ([MAT0057](#))
- 20 Emeritus Professor Klaus Wedell ([MAT0014](#))
- 21 FASNA ([MAT0056](#))
- 22 Fiona Forrest ([MAT0054](#))
- 23 GL Assessment ([MAT0011](#))
- 24 Hall Orchard Primary School ([MAT0007](#))
- 25 ICSA ([MAT0025](#))
- 26 Jamie Reed MP ([MAT0063](#))
- 27 Janet Downs ([MAT0002](#))
- 28 Liberal Democrat Education Association ([MAT0022](#))
- 29 Little Mead Academy Trust ([MAT0001](#))
- 30 Local Government Association ([MAT0030](#))
- 31 Martin Matthews ([MAT0004](#))
- 32 Mr Andy Allen ([MAT0046](#))
- 33 Mr Chris Waterman ([MAT0016](#))

- 34 Mr Pete Le Bas ([MAT0042](#))
- 35 Mr Simon Kidwell ([MAT0003](#))
- 36 Ms Shirina Khanum ([MAT0049](#))
- 37 NASUWT ([MAT0031](#))
- 38 National Association of Head Teachers ([MAT0018](#))
- 39 National Foundation for Educational Research ([MAT0034](#))
- 40 National Governors' Association ([MAT0044](#))
- 41 National Secular Society ([MAT0026](#))
- 42 National Union of Teachers ([MAT0015](#))
- 43 Neil Wallis ([MAT0060](#))
- 44 New Schools Network ([MAT0047](#))
- 45 Nicky Dixon ([MAT0052](#))
- 46 Oasis Community Learning ([MAT0035](#))
- 47 Ofsted ([MAT0040](#))
- 48 Paul Shevlin ([MAT0019](#))
- 49 Philip Kerridge ([MAT0062](#))
- 50 Plymouth CAST ([MAT0017](#))
- 51 Professor Pam Stapleton and Dr Anne Stafford ([MAT0037](#))
- 52 Professor Toby Greany and Dr Melanie Ehren ([MAT0010](#))
- 53 Race on the Agenda ([MAT0032](#))
- 54 REAch2 and Reach4 ([MAT0023](#))
- 55 Rescue Our Schools ([MAT0055](#))
- 56 Royal National Institute of Blind People ([MAT0036](#))
- 57 SEN Policy Research Forum ([MAT0061](#))
- 58 SENCO Forum ([MAT0041](#))
- 59 Sutton Trust ([MAT0012](#))
- 60 The Co-operative Academies Trust ([MAT0008](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2015–16

First Report	The role of Regional Schools Commissioners	HC 401 (HC 975)
Second Report	Holocaust Education	HC 480 (HC 974)
Third Report	Appointment of the Chief Regulator of Ofqual	HC 822
Fourth Report	Mental health and well-being of looked-after children	HC 481
First Joint Special Report	Education, skills and productivity: commissioned research	HC 565
First Special Report	Apprenticeships and traineeships for 16 to 19 year olds: Government Response to the Committee's Seventh Report of Session 2014–15	HC 317
Second Special Report	Extremism in schools: the Trojan Horse affair: Ofsted Response to the Committee's Seventh Report of Session 2014–15	HC 324
Fourth Special Report	Holocaust Education: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2015–16	HC 974
Fifth Special Report	The role of Regional Schools Commissioners: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2015–16	HC 975

Session 2016–17

First Report	Careers education, information, advice and guidance	HC 205
Second Report	Appointment of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills	HC 170 (HC 674)
Third Report	Social work reform	HC 201 (HC 733)
Fourth Report	Evidence check: Grammar schools	HC 780
Fifth Report	Recruitment and retention of teachers	HC 538
Sixth Report	Appointment of the Chair of the Office for Students	HC 882
First Special Report	Appointment of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2016–17	HC 674
Second Special Report	Social work reform: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2016–17	HC 733