

Joining a School Trust: First considerations

School Trusts are groups of schools that come together to form a single organisation. They are sometimes called Multi-Academy Trusts or MATs, but we prefer School Trusts because the word 'school' is universally understood and best describes what academies are.

Any standalone academy or maintained school can join an existing School Trust. When you are deciding which Trust to join, things to consider include:

Vision and values

The vision and values of the Trust will apply across its constituent schools. Revisit your own vision and values, identify what is important to you and your stakeholders, and use this as a mapping exercise to align your beliefs with existing Trusts. You should also consider whether your stakeholders have any rights that could impact on your decision (e.g., a Church of England school and Diocese).

Geography, type and size

Decide whether you want to join a local Trust, or whether a bigger Trust spanning a larger area would provide a broader outlook and opportunities. Think too about the different types and phase of school within a Trust, and make sure your own vision is reflected (e.g., a Trust with special schools, a Trust with a mix of primary and secondary etc.).

You should also decide whether your school would most benefit from joining a small and growing Trust, or whether a larger Trust would provide additional and more immediate benefits.

Governance and finance

Reflect on your current governance structure and who needs to make decisions. If you are a faith school, explore any limiting factors of which Trusts you will be able to join. Look at the Scheme of Delegation and ensure you understand how much responsibility your school will have in relation to governance and financial management, thinking about contributing to centralised operations, how capital investment is obtained and allocated, and how reserves are managed.

Trust Partnerships

The Department for Education introduced Trust Partnerships in 2021 to allow single academies or maintained schools to trial membership with a particular School Trust. Partnerships are agreed between the school and Trust, but all agreements are expected to be time limited; focused on teaching and learning; well documented; and with a view to converting and/or merging.

CST is the national organisation and sector body for School Trusts - advocating for, connecting and supporting Trusts.

Find out how CST can support you by visiting our website cstuk.org.uk