



Trust Review  
FINDINGS REPORT

**MANOR HALL  
ACADEMY TRUST**

## Context

Manor Hall is Multi Academy Trust made up of 13 academies.

A fourteenth school is due to join the Trust on 1 May 2022

A Free School is currently under construction and will join the Trust in 2023

MHAT operates in a number of Local Authorities from the Midlands to the North West

The Trust was created on 1 August 2015 with the first two schools joining and growth since has been steady but well thought out

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## Key Trustees and Staff

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### **Key Trustees**

Chair of Directors – John Alexander

Member & Director – John Glandfield

## Key Staff

CEO and Head of Trust – Richard Redgate

Trust CFO – Trina Lawlor

Chief Strategic Business Officer – Kate Staples

The Review is set against a **national landscape** which is changing, in that the DfE / Government has accelerated plans for a fully academised system and is looking for more conversions and MAT mergers to take place thereby increasing the number of schools in a MAT whilst reducing the actual number of Academy Trusts.

The Directors and CEO are aware of the risks the upcoming White Paper is likely to bring to even large MAT's such as MHAT and therefore have a full appreciation of the need for stability but with an eye on growth. Trust growth – we are pleased to note – will continue to be organic and based on all things being handled properly, robust due diligence being undertaken and not for the sake of growth. This shows a good level of awareness and risk mitigation in the Trust and this should be acknowledged. MHAT's growth has been steady and schools have benefitted from being in MHAT.

The upcoming White Paper is likely to revitalise the academy programme and show Maintained schools the benefits of collaboration in Multi Academy Trusts. It is also likely to place some degree of pressure on Single Academy Trusts, empty MAT's and small MAT's to consider joining or growing. MHAT is both well geographically located and sufficiently experienced to consider further growth both through the Maintained sector and Trust sector should Directors and CEO decide on this course of action post White Paper.

This Review takes into account the 6 Key features of Effective Governance as detailed in the Competency Framework for Governance

1. Strategic Leadership
2. Accountability
3. People
4. Structures
5. Compliance
6. Evaluation

# Section One

## Key Findings

### Trust Board

- The vision and ethos of the Trust shine through in all documentation and discussions.  
It's about the whole child. Helping them to cope with nitty-gritty of life and helping them to learn, to live and to survive in life. This ethos permeates the organisation at all levels.
- The Trust Board understandably started as a Representative model with governors from the constituent schools being appointed – but has now moved to skills-based organisation. Much work has been undertaken to appoint the right people with the right skill sets and – importantly – the right mindset
- The diversity of experience the Trust has is a major strength. Originally, there was too little business experience but now it is strong on the business / planning front. So the balance now between education and business is better.  
However, it is widely agreed that more Education skills are needed when the next recruitment takes place
- Several Directors feel there needs to be more diversity – the Board is dominated by older, white people and Directors say this is a consideration moving forward.  
Also, the question was raised in the 1-1 discussions - is there a disparity between men and women in schools. Is there a gender pay gap? Analysis at senior leadership level suggests that recent new schools have closed the gap but this should be kept under review by the Audit and Risk Committee nonetheless.
- The Board has good behavioural strengths. There is strong challenge but it is polite we are told  
There is a good balance of skills. Time management is good.
- The number of Directors is viewed as being sufficient at present  
However, some key Directors have their terms of office ending together soon. How do we avoid a cliff edge?

- The Trust schools are a major part of communities. More and better communications and rapport with Parents is advised  
This came across in the 1-1's as an area for development moving forward
- The Trust still has 3 sponsor schools in R I – so this is still a major investment and challenge
- The CEO ensures consistent information across the Trust and, in discussions with him, this is an important aspect of ensuring accurate information is available to help make more informed decisions
- Some Trust policies are exemplary and should be held up by the DfE/RSC as exemplars of outstanding practice. One in particular really stands out – Overview of Key Business Strategic Objectives. This is such a succinct document that not only explains quickly what the objectives are but also focuses all decisions into improving the lives of children. This is an outstanding document.

### **Hub Model**

- The proposed new Hub Model is the next stage in what seems to be a natural progression.  
The original Heads Group became a variety of Networking Groups at whole Trust level, but over time it then got too unwieldy at 10 schools. So then the Networking Group was split into Clusters and the Hub model is a natural evolution from this. Hubs are a good way to join up the schools in them but also offer an alternative route into the Trust should growth continue
- Respondents were keen on Hub Model. We are pleased to note the understanding that the Hub model may change as the Trust changes and this flexibility makes sound strategic sense
- It is good practice to create a direct link between Directors and local schools. In the MHAT case, it would make sense to have Link Directors for the Hubs. Otherwise, Directors may be spread too thinly if the linkage was with individual schools  
It would also be good practice to rotate these roles so that Directors can experience the whole of the Trust rather than becoming too familiar with one school alone.

- The Hub model will also help the Trust to localise and be more meaningful to communities – it gives parents chance to understand the Trust structure and relate to it.  
It will help Communication and Engagement – something that the Board is aware needs improving. Comments were made that the model may also help recruitment.
- The strongest argument for the model is that it will improve School-to-School support. It also appears to be a model that is attractive to different types of school (the example of the PRU joining was cited)
- The new structure has parallels in the business world – the creation of Divisions for example. In effect the Trust are creating Divisions or ‘Mini MATs’ as has been described.  
However this structure comes with a caution – the Board and CEO needs to ensure the essential ethos and values flow across all Trust. Hubs cannot be allowed to ‘go their own way.’ Oversight must still be strong and timely. This is even more important as and when the CEO leaves the Trust
- Also it has been commented that this model cannot come with another layer of management/ overheads/communications. So yes, we can have ‘Mini Mats; but we cannot have mini-Trusts’

### **Growth**

- Imminent growth is already built-in with the creation of the Free School and with Oakfield Lodge joining.
- Given this, comments were made that this is a time to consolidate. Further growth could be a distraction and ‘we don’t need it at present.’ We have ‘enough on our plate with the three R Is and the two new schools’
- Directors were however, acutely aware of the National Landscape and the added pressure this will bring, probably externally, for further growth
- So although perhaps not imminent and not necessarily to be encouraged, it would be good practice to map-out what could be the broader plan growth? What would happen for example if the RSC says - can you take on 5 more schools?

- Having a Growth Plan demonstrates the different options available, and their implications. It doesn't mean to say any of these will happen, but crucially what it does is to help the Trust keep control over its own future rather than it letting outside events determine what happens.
- One of the benefits of the Hub model is that future Growth can come at Hub / Cluster level.
- There is a willingness to extend the use of the Partnership Agreement that has successfully worked for both MHAT and Oakfield Lodge

### **Central Team**

- The new role of Head of Governance and Compliance is a good development. It will facilitate communications cross the LABs and up to Trust – horizontally and vertically. This is a strategic strength of the Trust in ensuring alignment of Central Team growth with trust growth
- The Central Team is viewed as a strength – 'we get the right answers when asked'  
The Team however needs to be scaled to take on board new schools. We are informed that Capacity and Sufficiency modelling is being done at present to test this.
- Is there an opportunity to look at Central Structure – flattening the structure – alongside the Hub Model? Curve ball questions like this will trigger some conversation which will only add to the decision making
- There is a potential risk that if Richard goes, then others in Central Team might also go because of close association in the past – see Succession below. This is a major risk to the Trust and one that is fully understood by Directors

## Induction

- Induction 1 – the generics of being a Director in a MAT or a member of a Local Advisory Board) is crucial in getting it to know the functions of the Trust and Directors roles within that. It is also about getting to know all the schools and getting the strong MHAT Ethos embedded.

So, Directors should revisit induction to ensure it remains robust and all should visit schools once allowed to get a better feel for all MHAT schools.

- Most Directors know what it takes to be a Director. But what is also needed is what is it like being a Director *at MHAT* – with its very special ethos, organisation, schools and children? This could form Induction 2 (induction specific to the Trust or school ). With the current use of virtual platforms this could take place via such a medium for time efficient practice but still with the personal touch.

## Succession Planning

- The CEO's probable retirement has been mentioned in discussions.  
With no firm date, this poses a potential risk – so the Trust should assume and plan for the worst-case scenario in terms of timing.
- There is a choice to appoint within or look for an external selection. Views have been expressed both ways but it is unanimous that there is open selection process.
- It is good that a recruitment consultant is on board to help with executive search.
- In addition to the CEO, the Terms of Office of several key Directors also come to an end together.  
There is a danger of there being a cliff-edge. Planning a staggered programme will ensure a smoother transition and limit the knowledge loss. This process has already started to take shape but needs to stay under the microscope.
- It is suggested the approach should be - how many directors can we afford to lose each year – then plan accordingly?

- So, it seems clear that any Succession Plan needs to cover CEO; Directors; and Central Team is now an immediate requirement.  
There needs to be a clear structure to it, alongside a plan and a process with action and timetables attached including where responsibility lies.
  - The Trust has utilised a Director-finding company in the past. The Trust therefore needs to specify what it wants as Directors as part of this process  
Additionally, the Trust could go out to those businesses which have a CSR policy. There is also a data-base of people / exec volunteering. Defining the required skill set has always worked for MHAT and this should be applauded and continued.
  - There was support for idea that the Trust potentially uses shadow Directors, before the existing one goes –sitting alongside each other for a period. Planning will be key
  - In a general sense the question was raised - how do we make ourselves more attractive to key jobs? The difficulty in recruiting the Head of Governance led to this question - how do we make ourselves an irresistible employer/proposition to candidates? MHAT is now well positioned to be an Employer of Choice in the sector and more should be made of the benefits of working for MHAT.
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## Section Two

### Recommendations

#### Key Findings:

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Succession planning is vital - especially for Richard as the CEO and key Directors who are also likely to leave in the coming few years

Need to consider staggering leaving the Trust so they don't end up having a mass exodus which will create a vacuum

Communication between Directors and LAB's is key so new role of Head of Trust Compliance and Governance will help. This needs planning out how that person will move between the Directors and the LAB's and between the LAB's themselves to ensure a thorough overlap of communication

Growth considerations with the White Paper need documenting in particular with a school joining (Oakfield Lodge) and the Free school and with a potential retirement of Richard. It all needs discussing

Induction 1 and 2 could form a more robust process. As the Trust grows, more and more people become part of the governance function and they need onboarding - and training - robustly

Education skill set needed - 1 more on Board

Further improve engagement with stakeholders - at least discuss this. Schools joining will need to feel the Directors can understand the beating heart of their school

Possibly load up the Board with new people - even unofficially - before experienced ones leave to ensure a smooth transition

Revisit central team structure with a focus on succession planning - not just Richard

Need to fully consider and appreciate the work-load involved the nearer the Free School becomes a reality. Trust to consider the workload and commission support early. It will come at a time when Richard may have tendered his resignation / retirement

Advise extended use of the Associate Agreement / Partnership Agreement as a way to attract schools

Link Director training to ensure the role is not an oversight / policing one

Revisiting formally the prospect of growth post release of the White Paper is advised so the Trust can react accordingly when a school enquires or the RSC comes calling

Directors to self-review against the 5 Areas in a Growth Audit (also 5 areas any school would consider when joining MHAT ):

Standards & Track Record

People & Leadership

Financial Sustainability

Vision & Growth Plan

Risk Mitigation

## Section Three

### Key Functions of the Trust

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#### Key Findings:

- **How well do Directors ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction?**

The vision, ethos and values of the Trust are strong and have been created collaboratively with Directors, LABs and the Executive.

There is a strong strategic direction to the Trust. This is very good practice.

Additionally, the Trust recognises the need to devote sufficient time to strategy, whilst ensuring governance of the operation elements are maintained.

- **How well do Directors contribute to the Trust's self-evaluation, and understand its strengths and weaknesses?**

This Trust is not afraid of self-assessing and utilising external agencies to ensure its activities are robust where appropriate (this Review and previous Governance Reviews for example)

Strengths and Weaknesses are evaluated as part of Strategic Planning.

The Trust is also strong on self-evaluation of Governance. The new role of Compliance & Governance Lead is a positive step into further improving governance across the Trust as was the previous role of Head of Governance. This shows MHAT robustly considers the impact of governance on performance across the trust

- **How well Directors support and strengthen school leadership?**

This is a Trust Board and SLT that is cohesive through mutual respect. The CEO feels supported and valued but at the same time appreciates the challenge Trustees provide. Directors feel the CEO leads the Trust well.

The Trust has provided strong support to individual school leadership.

- **How well do Directors provide challenge and hold the CEO and other senior leaders to account for improving the quality of teaching, pupils' achievement and pupils' behaviour and safety?**

Challenge takes place in meetings. There is a strong skill set on the Trust. The data provided to Directors is good. Questions are effective

- **How well do Directors use performance management systems, including the performance management of the CEO, to improve teaching, leadership and management?**

Both the Trust Leaders and the School Leadership refer to relevant and appropriate challenge in meetings and in other formats. We understand that this is carried through to performance management of school leaders and staff

- **How well do Directors ensure solvency and probity, and that the financial resources made available to the school are managed effectively?**

We are unable to comment fully on this as we have not looked at finances. However, Minutes show finances are questioned and discussed and we were made aware of the financial prowess of the Trust CFO. Trustees say they challenge finances robustly and that robust data is provided as a matter of course.

- **How well do Directors operate in such a way that statutory duties are met and priorities are approved?**

Directors ensure statutory responsibilities are met through record keeping and by SLT planning a diary system. The CFO and central team provide timely updates on statutory duties. The CFO and central team are strategic and support the Trust well

- **How well do Directors engage with key stakeholders?**

Engagement is something to consider in any growth plan since new schools joining will not have the knowledge or commonality the founder schools had/have. Engagement and communication must be robust as the Trust grows.

## Section Four

### Action Plans

Key Findings:

#### 1. Action Plan for the Trust Board

Priority for Improvement	Action Required	By When	By Whom	Success Criteria	Impact/Evaluation (for the Directors to complete termly)
<p>Directors to further develop a Growth Plan to support decision making taking into account the national landscape</p> <p><b>KEY ACTION</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree priorities</li> <li>• Consider offering different models to different schools/Trusts</li> <li>• Review the HUB model to ensure it remains appropriate</li> <li>• Review Scheme of Delegation and Topslice offering to future schools</li> <li>• (Above actions documented in existing Development Plans; Finance, Standards, Strategic),</li> </ul>	Sept 22	CEO, DCEO,CFO, CSBO, SIM	<p>Priorities agreed and documented</p> <p>Trust even more focussed</p> <p>Trust can easily produce Growth Plan if requested by RSC</p> <p>All Directors can fully explain Growth Plan</p>	
Directors to further strengthen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directors who have not yet attended a</li> </ul>	Sept 22	CEO, CSBO, CHoG	Any new Directors have attended Induction	

the Induction Plan, new Directors will need mentoring	comprehensive Induction Training need to do so and experienced Trustees need to mentor new ones			A Mentor system is in place Records easily accessible	
The Trust needs to consider further and create a more robust succession planning policy  <b>KEY ACTION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-evaluate what skill sets and traits are required</li> <li>• Ensure succession planning is regularly an agenda item</li> <li>• (Above Actions in existing Development Plans; Governance, Strategic)</li> <li>• Agree the priorities of what the Trust wants in a CEO</li> </ul>	Sept 22	CEO, CFO, CSBO, DCEO, SIM	A robust plan is in place that is adaptable to create a seamless transition A Succession Plan is easily accessible and is aligned with the Risk Plan	
Further develop the Link Director system to join up the layers of governance across the Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree what the role descriptor is</li> <li>• Named Directors for named schools/HUBs</li> <li>• Agree a timeline for rotation</li> <li>• Agree a reporting mechanism</li> <li>• Agree role descriptor and schedule for new Head of Compliance and Governance</li> </ul>	Sept 22	CEO, CFO, CSBO, DCEO, CHoG	All Directors and schools understand the role and able to explain it A reporting template/mechanism is in place Directors able to understand further about the schools Head of Compliance & Governance has a diary system of visits in place	

Further improve Director training and CPD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Source relevant training courses/sessions</li> <li>• Create a robust CPD record</li> <li>• Plan at least a year's programme aligned to self-assessment/external review findings</li> </ul>	Sept 22	As Above	<p>Director support and challenge is even more robust</p> <p>All Directors are updated on Trust wide performance and issues</p> <p>An External Review of Governance in 2023 confirms improved skill sets</p>	
The Trust to self-review against 5 key growth/due diligence areas detailed in Section 2 of this report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-assess and/or use external support</li> <li>• Use this report and the finance report</li> <li>• Record findings against each area and plan actions in identified areas of need</li> </ul>	Sept 22	As Above	<p>A 'prospectus' is created with strengths ( and even areas of focus ) that can be used in Growth and to withstand due diligence by others</p>	

## Section Five

### Suggested Trust/LGB/GB Training and Resources

Key Findings Cont'd:

**Suggested Governor Training & Resources** - *This is a list of training sessions that benefit all Governance functions. It is an aide memoire to allow a Trust or school to support a training programme and not a specific list of training sessions advised as part of this Review*

<b>Trustee / Governor Training</b>	<b>Useful Training Services / Resources</b>
Induction for new governors / trustees	Marshall Professional Development
Trustee Development Programme	Confederation of Schools Trusts
Key Functions of the Directors within the Trust Governance Structure	National Governors Association – NGA
Scheme of Delegation	Hub4Leaders / The School Bus
SEND Code of Practice	The Key
Safeguarding	ASP
Understanding Assessment Data	Parent View
Financial Management	FFT Data Dashboard
Understanding Schools Finance	Moderngovernor.com
Directors Guide to the Law	LA Governor Training
Exclusions	
Restricted Physical Interventions	
Trust Strategy for School Improvement	
Roles and Responsibilities	
Planning for Succession	
Monitoring and Evaluation – Directors Role	
The Directors Role in School Improvement	
Government Grants to support pupil progress	
Directors Duties on Compliance	

Pay Policy Behaviour/Attendance in School Governance in Multi Academy Trusts	
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## Section Six

### Overall Assessment

In summary:

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- Overall, the Trust performs extremely well and is well-led. Directors and the CEO are joined up. The CEO is exceptional in understanding the sector and seeing where the Trust needs to be. Directors are highly skilled and fully supportive
- During the interviews with key staff and Directors, it became apparent that there is a willingness to make changes happen when needed, as all are committed to providing the best for the students they work with. This is vital, as without the full co-operation of all involved, it will be difficult to consider a plan for change/growth.
- The Directors and Executive Leaders now need to take ownership of this report and look to designing an action plan that will help shape the Trust going forward and provide the necessary tools to make effective change.
- Trust growth must now be considered at Trust level and decisions made taking into account regional and national landscapes even though MHAT is a large Trust already
- MHAT should be applauded for increasing central team capacity whilst aligning with trust growth. This strategic strength will continue to serve MHAT moving forward
- Nothing red-flags in this Trust. The Trust is well placed to maintain performance and be a beacon of Special Education in the region and even further afield

Not Used

Not Used



Not Used