



Maghull High School Joining The Southport Learning Trust – DFE Case Study (February 2021)

All to: Aspire, Achieve, Enjoy

Introduction

Maghull High School is an oversubscribed average sized 11-18 comprehensive school with over 950 students on roll. The large majority of students are White British, with very small numbers of European, African, Asian and mixed heritage students. The school site is in Maghull; however, the school draws students from a wide and socio-economically highly diverse catchment from over 40 primary schools. Over 480 students live outside Sefton in four other local authorities, mainly in North Liverpool and Knowsley. A high proportion of students travel to school by public transport. 6% of the school population live within a 1-mile radius of the school. Attainment at entry is in line with national average. The percentage of disadvantaged students is slightly above the figure for other schools nationally. Retention in sixth form is positive, the majority of Year 11 students progress into our sixth form.

Challenges of being a Single Academy Trust (SAT)

Being a single academy trust can present a number of challenges. Sometimes you can feel quite isolated and vulnerable as a SAT; particularly SAT that 'Requires Improvement'. The development, challenge and improvement in some areas of leadership and student outcomes can lack pace and rigour. SATs can lack critical friends and support and it can be difficult and expensive to source reliable and appropriate external support and expertise for key priority development areas. It can also be difficult to attract and recruit in subject shortage areas. As a SAT you have reduced bargaining and purchasing power and is difficult to achieve economies of scale.

Reasons for wanting to join a Multi Academy Trust (MAT)

Maghull High School believed that there were a number of benefits associated with joining a MAT. School improvement would be significantly strengthened through a collaborative approach to prioritising school improvement planning with access to high quality professional expertise and support for improving teaching, learning and assessment. This would accelerate improvements in student outcomes and the journey to be at least 'good' at pace. Through a MAT schools can take advantage of economies of scale as a powerful collective group with significant bargaining power. MATs bring together the collective expertise of primary and secondary professionals and the communities they serve, working collegiately to improve the life chances of all young people.

Decision on wanting to join the Southport Learning Trust

We carried out desk top research into the advantages and drawbacks of different types of MAT (small, medium and large). The Headteacher and Deputy Headteachers visited a local medium sized MAT school to learn about their experience. This helped to reassure us of the transfer process and reinforce the importance of joining a smaller Trust whose vision and values aligned with our own.

Our journey began informally in December 2018 when the Chair of Governors and the new Headteacher approached the Chair of the Southport Learning Trust requesting to meet informally to hold initial explanatory talks with the Chair and the Executive Headteacher regarding the possibility of Maghull High School joining the Southport Learning Trust family of schools. It was important to establish that both parties believed this to be a positive and mutual beneficial partnership moving forward. Our vision and values for improving the life chances of all young people were closely aligned.

The Southport Learning Trust has an excellent reputation and a proven track record of school improvement and excellence in both primary and secondary settings. The Trust actively encourages schools within the Trust to celebrate their individuality, identity and culture under the umbrella of the Trust.

Over the spring and summer terms of 2019 a close school to school support (S2SS) partnership for senior and middle leaders was established and both Trust boards commenced informal due diligence. It was clear that the Southport Learning Trust's proven track record of excellence and school improvement would be a superb fit for Maghull High School. They understood our school community and the challenges we faced and believed they could have a positive impact. We wanted to be part of their family of schools.

Formal due diligence commenced in the autumn term 2019, with transfer for completion targeted for September 2020. Despite the challenges of a global pandemic, the due diligence and transfer process was made easier due to the expertise of the Trust having been through the process before, alongside the support of the Regional Delivery Directorate and Browne Jacobson. Both Trusts felt it was vitally important that the TUPE consultation meeting with teaching and support staff and trade union representatives from Maghull High School needed to take place face-to-face, whilst other transfer activities could easily be carried out remotely. It was agreed by all parties involved that the formal transfer date be pushed back to the end of October 2020 to allow for the TUPE consultation meeting to take place safely on the school site. Maghull High School formally joined the Southport Learning Trust family of schools in November 2020.

Benefits of joining a MAT

There are a number of significant benefits associated with joining a MAT:

- Makes you raise your game - learn and develop quickly, aspire to be outstanding, a supportive competitive ethos fostered
- Enhanced communication through regular biweekly meetings of the Trust Executive Management team – CEO support, checking in on the wellbeing of senior leaders
- Clear Scheme of Delegation - clarity of policy and practice across all strategic functions
- Support, development and mentoring for school governors, senior and middle leaders
- Teaching and Learning S2SS - key subject intervention support for middle leaders, curriculum design, support and delivery - already seeing evidence of impact externally validated student outcomes, GCSE English resit pass rate of 70% compared to 49% nationally - incredibly motivating
- Student leadership development programmes, such as, Digital Champions, literacy leaders, junior and senior prefects
- Trust wide CPD/INSET for Trustees, senior and middle leaders, teaching and support staff
- Trust wide IT Strategy development - upskilling network support staff, increased network security, centralised new MIS system development and migration, strategic programme of investment in new technology - hardware and software, school website redesign, School Cloud virtual parent evening software and Governors Hub app rolled out at speed
- Robust quality assurance processes and moderation activities between schools
- Collective approach to decision making, spread of high-quality expertise
- Trust Financial Hub - high level expertise led by Executive Director, intelligent approach across the Trust, significant efficiencies and cost savings in contract procurement, consistency in using management budget forecasting tools and PS Financials software, opportunities for income generation, economies of scale and increased bargaining power
- Marketing the school under the Trust umbrella aids recruitment and retention
- HR advice, guidance and support: Trust policy implementation, TLR restructuring, supporting the recruitment process of key appointment, sharing of job descriptions, support in dealing with media and Freedom of Information requests, help in dealing with staffing issues
- Staff wellbeing and mental health support - sharing ideas, access to Trust counselling and physiotherapy services, cycle scheme

Challenges of joining a MAT, and how we overcame them

The process of joining the Southport Learning Trust was an enjoyable and exciting experience. Informal, yet honest and frank conversations regarding our improvement priorities between Trust Chair and CEO and Maghull High School's Chair of Governors and Headteacher greatly assisted process and reassured both parties this was the right thing to do. The Trust involved Governors and senior staff in Trust Strategy Development days, and the Headteacher was invited to Trust executive management team meetings which supported the transition process. We were made to feel welcomed and valued - we too had a lot that we could contribute and bring to the Trust.

Consistent support and guidance from the Regional Delivery Directorate in the transfer process - school links Amanda Buck, Leanne Chadwick and Luke Renwick provided a clear road map/action plan with milestone targets that helped keep the transfer process on track despite the challenges presented by the pandemic.

Understanding the legal process was challenging and time consuming, whilst leading a school in the midst of a global pandemic. The Headteacher of Maghull High School was fortunate to have such a supportive and skilled Governing body and senior leadership team to assist. The Trust CEO, Executive Director, and Browne Jacobson were incredibly helpful; their expertise and experience was invaluable. They provided sound advice and guidance on the timings of consultation periods and information and action required were requested in a timely fashion to ensure TUPE, staff payroll, school warranties, land transfer and contracts had a smooth transition.

Overcoming concerns from Trust Board and staff, how we brought staff along

There was open, clear and transparent communication was established throughout the entire process, the Trust board, staff and trade union representatives were kept regularly updated and fully informed; this helped to further build trust and reassure individuals. The Chair, CEO and Executive Director from the Southport Learning Trust were approachable and actively encouraged questions and concerns to be shared with them. This was vitally important.

In advance of TUPE formal consultation process, CEO Ian Raikes, welcomed questions from Maghull High staff and the Governing body. A virtual meeting/presentation in the summer term of 2020 answered number of questions/queries around joining a MAT. We would highly recommend this activity.

The S2SS partnership enabled staff and students to start experiencing the benefits of joining a MAT prior to formal transfer and develop subject/departmental networks. Maghull High School built upon high levels of parental trust and engagement; they trusted the school to make decisions that would benefit their children and the local community.

Impact and benefits of a MAT has had on our work during the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic

Being part of a MAT during this time has been hugely supportive and reassuring. Having regular biweekly meetings of the Trust Executive Management team ensures a consistent and swift response to a rapidly changing and dynamic situation that impacts directly on all stakeholders. The team talk through approach and response to Government guidance updates, share what 'new normal' looks like in each Trust school, discuss how best to use catch-up funding and deal with pressing national and local issues swiftly. It has been particularly helpful sharing resources such as risk assessments, data capture forms, virtual training and parental communication which avoids duplication of effort.

The central purchasing power of the Trust in the procurement of PPE and commissioning of external Health and Safety audits helped to mitigate risk and create Covid secure safe school sites. When setting up testing centres in school it was helpful to be able to share ideas and suggestions around suitable locations, methods for gaining parental consent and staff training and deployment.

This was important when responding to new Covid-19 variants in the local area which helped to reassure anxious parents, students and staff.

Being able to share our remote education strategy, experiences and evaluations has resulted in high levels of student engagement, helped to manage parental expectations/concerns and support staff mental health and wellbeing and workload. Investment and development in technology such as webcams/microphones, School Cloud software and learning platforms has been hugely beneficial and supported students and staff working from home.

In preparation of the outcome of Ofqual's consultation on how GCSE/L2 and A level/L3 grades should be awarded in summer 2021, work has begun on the Trust's external moderation process to ensure grades are accurate, stand-up external scrutiny and potential appeals from students/parents.

It was wonderful when the Trust secured 150 Christmas hampers to be delivered to our most vulnerable families on Christmas Eve, kindly donated by local business, The Bakehouse. They were very much appreciated by our families during a time of need.

Davina Aspinall
Headteacher
Maghull High School