



Maghull High School Joining The Southport Learning Trust - Case Study

All to: Aspire Achieve Enjoy

'Great schools changing the lives of children in Sefton schools'

Introduction

Maghull High School is an oversubscribed average sized 11-18 comprehensive school with over 1100 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 diverse catchment from over 40 primary schools. Over 500 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. A decreasing minority of the school population live within a 1-mile radius (5%) of the school. Retention in sixth form is positive, the majority of Year 11 students progress into our sixth form.

Attainment on entry is broadly in line with national average. The percentage of disadvantaged students (31%) is above the figure for other schools nationally, 20% of students are on SEND support and 2.7% of students have an EHCP/statement.

Challenges of being a Single Academy Trust (SAT)

Being a single academy trust presented a number of challenges. Sometimes we felt quite isolated and vulnerable as a SAT, particularly a SAT that 'required improvement'. The development, challenge and improvement in some areas of leadership and student outcomes lacked pace and rigour. As a SAT we had reduced bargaining and purchasing power and difficulty in achieving economies of scale. SATs can lack critical friends and sourcing support 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.

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 collegially 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 and also ensured we kept the 'uniqueness' of Maghull High School.

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. 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.

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.

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 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 School 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/departamental networks. Maghull High School built upon well-established 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 had on our work during a global pandemic

Being part of a MAT during the pandemic was hugely supportive and reassuring. Having regular biweekly meetings of the Trust Executive Management team ensured a consistent and swift response to a rapidly changing and dynamic situation that impacted directly on all stakeholders. 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.

Being able to share our remote education strategy, experiences and evaluations 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 new technology, such as webcams/microphones, Timetabler, Arbor and School Cloud software and learning platforms ensured continuity of learning and supported students and staff working from home.

Benefits of joining the Southport Learning Trust - Reflection Two Years On

- Marketing the school under the Trust umbrella has significantly aided recruitment and retention – **student numbers for September 2023, from Sefton applications alone, have increased from 114 first choice preferences to 192 (PAN 186)**. Overall preferences (706) increased by 110 on previous year. Low staff turnover.
- **School Improvement and School to School Support** - key subject intervention support for middle leaders in several subject areas (core, science and humanities) in 360 diagnostics, evidenced based research informing curriculum design, supporting rewriting of curriculum maps and schemes of work. Evidenced based research improving the quality of teaching and learning - evidence of impact on progress through external and internal QA activities, student voice, work scrutiny and student outcomes.
- **Ofsted Inspections** - Support from CEO and Trust Board during remote Ofsted monitoring inspection March 2021 – Leadership judged to be effective. **Full inspection January 2022 – regraded Good Provider**. Selected to take part in English Research Project November 2022 – case study material requested.
- **Trust Communities of School Improvement** – significant investment in collaborative research led subject specific and senior and middle leader professional development.

Middle Leaders

- Sharing curriculum intent, implementation and impact
- Assessment and moderation
- Planning subject professional development
- Using EdTech and MS Teams to support leadership of teaching and learning
- Improving literacy and numeracy through subjects
- Linking business effectively with subjects to support wider aspiration building of our students

Senior Leaders

- Using OFSTED framework as a vehicle for achieving excellence in areas
- Share strengths and areas for development to support solutions in Trust schools
- Peer review SEFs to provide challenge and support
- **Student leadership development programmes**, such as, Digital Champions, Equality and Eco Champions, DoE, literacy leaders, junior and senior prefects. Trust schools competitions and challenges – writing and art competitions, most recently History Off challenge.
- **Trust wide INSET** for Trustees, senior and middle leaders, teaching and support staff – **Beacon of Inclusion**. Approached by LA to bid for Resourced Provision. **Trust investment in Applied Psychologies service** - educational psychology, assessment, intervention, therapy and training. 'Building Better Learners' joint INSET day planned for February 2023 with keynote speakers such as Sam Strickland.
- Enhanced support, challenge and communication through regular biweekly meetings of the **Trust Executive Management team**. **Collaborative approach to decision making**, spread of high-quality expertise from primary through to sixth form.
- **High Profile School Achievements/Recognition** – Quality in Careers Standard Award, Mental Health & Wellbeing Award, Debate Mate regional champions, Educate Awards – Outstanding Commitment to STEM Award winners and nominated finalist for SEND Provision Award. Working towards Arts Award. Student and staff Digital Ambassadors – part of EdTech change team.
- **CEO actively supports all staff** – critical friend, challenge and support. Mentoring for Headteacher, checking in on the wellbeing of senior and middle leaders and impact in their strategic roles, offering advice, guidance and support – ensuring pace of school improvements. Staff wellbeing and managing workload.
- **Promoting and supporting school and Trust events** such as Open Evenings, Presentation Awards evening, primary school visits and wider school events. Fostering culture of celebration across the Trust.
- **Trust Governance - Clear Scheme of Delegation** - clarity of policy and practice across all strategic functions. Support, training, development and mentoring for school governors.
- **Trust Director of Teaching and Learning** leading policy development - robust quality assurance processes and moderation activities between schools. Development of Trust Lesson Principles to support development in school.

- **Staff wellbeing and mental health support prioritised** – Trust **Schools Advisory Service**, sharing ideas, access to Trust counselling and physiotherapy services, cycle scheme – complete wraparound care of teaching and support staff through central purchase of staff wellbeing and support programme.
- **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, **supporting CIF bids, income generation**, financial reporting to ESFA and LGB.
- Support from Trust Strategic Network Manager – **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. Most recently successful **Connecting the Classroom bid, £186,000 investment secured**.
- **Support from Trust Estates Manager** – site safety and development, staff training, asbestos management, health and safety compliance and securing value for money.
- **Support from Trust HR Manager - advice, guidance and support:** Trust policy implementation, TLR restructuring, supporting the recruitment process of key appointments, sharing of job descriptions, support in dealing with media and Freedom of Information requests, handling complaints and invaluable help and expertise in dealing with staffing issues.

Maghull High School is proud to be a member of the Southport Learning Trust - a family of 'great schools changing the lives of children in Sefton schools'.

Davina Aspinall
Headteacher
Maghull High School

January 2023