

## 'What's in it for me?'

Why should a school join a multi-academy trust? It's a good question. After all, there is a membership fee (the top slice of funding that goes to the trust) and successful schools doing well on their own may not feel it is in their best interest to part with this cash.

Well, I would argue that there is a lot to be gained from being in a trust despite this. In the current educational landscape, there is little support for schools, whether a school is maintained by the local authority or a standalone academy. Austerity has taken its toll; services and resources are scarce, underfunded and hard to access. Being part of a trust can help alleviate some of these issues. Never has it felt more important to be part of something bigger.

But it's more than this. In the case of the Sherborne Area Schools Trust (SAST), it's family. We take seriously the values that underpin the trust. Every school is an equal partner, regardless of whether they are a big secondary or a small village primary. We understand that every school is unique, and we want to champion and celebrate that. For those who appreciate a Star Trek metaphor, we are not The Borg, and have no interest in taking over the universe and assimilating all those with whom we come into contact. We want to encourage every school to grow in its own way and foster its own identity and culture.

Which is not to say that everything is always calm and harmonious. As with every family, there are ups and downs. Some schools require more support than others at different times. But nothing stays the same and positions change. What we all need to remember is that when we're strong, we should be there for those who are down. This is what SAST is about.

Emperor penguins get this. When conditions are harsh, they huddle for warmth. After a time, the penguins on the inside who have been protected from the wind and extreme cold, move to the outside and swap with those who had been protecting them. Every penguin plays an important role supporting the collective. It's a positive mixture of altruism and self-interest which applies equally to SAST and its member schools.

We're not perfect; there are always things to improve. Nevertheless, there is much to shout about. There is a high level of expertise, effective practice and professional capital in our trust. Many of our schools have benefited from improvements to premises and grounds. Many have had important new IT infrastructure installed. All the schools are able to draw on the expertise provided by the trust finance and human resources teams.

Just as importantly, anyone joining SAST will discover loyal colleagues who will fight their corner and do their best by them.

***Written by Steve Smith, SAST Head of School Improvement and Deputy CEO  
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