

Title	Inside view: The 5 things we look for in schools wanting to join our academy trust
Description	An article from Toby Salt, Chief Executive, Ormiston Academies Trust on questions he considers when school want to join the trust. This is an interesting read for schools considering forming or joining a MAT.
Body	<p>The is shared from Schools Week 11/01/2016</p> <p>Educationists often are asked to behave like used car salesmen to promote their wares, but always take a proper look under the bonnet before you make long-term commitments.</p> <p>When I'm considering schools that want to join the Ormiston Academies Trust (OAT) – and we're not short of requests – I go through a number of questions.</p> <p>Is the chemistry right? Don't underestimate your gut feel; if something doesn't feel right, chances are it isn't. While it's exciting to grow a trust, growing it in the wrong way can destabilise it, so make sure whoever you bring on board shares your ethos and invests time at the outset to check that personalities match.</p> <p>Is what you offer what they need? There is no algorithm or Department for Education data set that can replace what you know about your trust's capacity to support a particular school. Is the location right? Do you have capacity where it needs support? We've been approached by a primary school in an area where I know we have an exceptional head that is looking to take on wider responsibilities, so the match might just work. But that isn't always the case. Picking up a school where you have no geographical footprint, or where you lack senior capacity, won't be good for either side.</p> <p>Be honest from the outset – don't fudge. I can't stress this enough. Be clear what your non-negotiable asks are – for example, if you require schools to use particular data, financial and reporting systems, or adopt particular pedagogical approaches. OAT is non-prescriptive, but still requires schools to collaborate and be consistent on key practices. If a potential school doesn't accept your red lines, then it won't work.</p> <p>The same is important for governance. Too often sponsors do not communicate the reality that local governing bodies ultimately become sub-committees of the main board, with reduced autonomy – disguise this at your peril! Don't promise to keep any governors if you don't intend to and explain how they will be selected or elected in the future. Transparency like this, early on, will garner trust and reap long-term benefits.</p> <p>Staffing structures Be honest before a school joins you if you think that a staff restructure is required, explain how it will be done and when. Most importantly, assess the leadership and school improvement plans –</p>

do you want the current leadership to be part of the future? Don't make promises if you don't. Similarly, make sure you understand where a good head is on their professional journey – that is, do you want to take on a school if the leader you admire is about to retire? This whole area needs to be treated sensitively, but it should be tackled early. Some trusts complete a mini Ofsted before taking on a school and OAT uses detailed data, complemented by getting our senior team on the ground to triangulate figures with what they see and hear.

Physical structures

Don't forget the buildings. Be wary of any asbestos, leaking roofs, promised capital builds or private finance initiatives. The physical infrastructure of the school and any tied finances associated with it are important. We work with a surveyor to ensure we take on projects with our eyes open.

Don't be the used car salesman

Finally, be clear on the benefits for schools joining you, but don't fill yourself full of hyperbole. Point out that schools will have access to greater CPD, expanded networks, peer support and challenge, up-to-date knowledge, advice and national influence as part of a wider family. However, don't promise overnight transformation or present yourself as the white knight. Every school is complex and it takes time to unpick that and set it back on course. As quickly as someone thanks you for taking on a troubled school, they will be asking you within months why it is not yet transformed if you have over-promised – so be realistic.

Get all of this early engagement right and take time over the courtship, then the marriage will be one that lasts.

Taken from [Schools Week](#)

ServiceLink	Governor Development Service
School Type	All Schools
Contact Details	governors@leics.gov.uk
AttentionLink	Governors
Action	For Action / Response
Expires	
Key Word	MAT
Service	Governor Development Service