

# QSG

QUEEN STREET GROUP

## ANNUAL REPORT 2022 – 2023



<b>Literacy in science posters</b> Prefixes and suffixes	<b>HYPO-</b> (below, under) Hypodermis Hypota Hypodermis Hypodermis	<b>Q-</b>
<b>BI-, DI-</b> (two) Biodiversity Lactobacillus Diploid cell	<b>POLY-</b> (many) Polymerase Phagocyte Plexus	<b>HOM-</b> (alike, same) Homocidal Homology Homeostasis
<b>-PHOBIC</b> (fearing) Hydrophobic	<b>-PHILIC</b> (loving) Hydrophilic	<b>EXO-</b> (outside) Exocrine gland Exotherm Exoskeleton
<b>SYN-</b> (together) Synthesis Synthesis	<b>-ASE</b> (enzyme) Lipase Amylase Protease	<b>Cockshut Hill SUMMIT LEARNING</b>

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# FOREWORD

## Welcome to the fifth Annual Report of the Queen Street Group of Multi-Academy Trusts

This year has seen expansion of QSG. Our member Trusts have increased from 22 to 36, and now include greater representation from Special and Alternative Provision schools.

As you will read in these pages, the scope of our activities has increased. This surge in growth has drawn from the careful nurturing of strong roots in the early years since our formal foundation in 2018.

Our Report last year opened with the words, "After two years of unprecedented disruption caused by Covid-19, 2021–22 has seen something of a return to accustomed pre-pandemic rhythms in schools." The reality of the last year is that leaders have had to grapple with an unprecedented mix of challenges.

The ongoing impact of lockdown gives schools much work not just in catching up learning, but restoring expectations of behaviour and attendance. A cocktail of price increases due to energy supply, inflation and salary increases has made budgeting a risky challenge. Sector confidence in Ofsted is becoming more fragile. It is unsurprising that a wave of strikes has added to this perfect storm.

QSG has worked this year to support leaders with a strong personal network as they grapple with these challenges, to share and generate improved practice and to influence those who can improve policy across the system. In short, QSG gives its members hope for the future.

We have shaped our activity this year around three key areas:

- **Supporting MATs to grow well**
- **Women into leadership**
- **MATs as leaders in their communities**

These priorities are determined by both moral and policy drivers. It is right that MAT leaders are diverse and authentic. Particularly in the light of increasing need and decreasing provision, it is right that MATs are leaders of their communities. MATs are the best way currently available of organising schools for maximum impact, and QSG is supporting its members of whatever size to do so.

We have engaged in CEO meetings with policy leaders at the DfE, ESFA and Ofsted. Public service leaders and those at the forefront of trust practice have helped to formulate our thinking. It is clear that we have built trust as a forum for an intimate exchange of views without fear of exposure to a Twitter explosion.

This year has seen growth in the number of our Expert Groups, the attendance at their meetings and the impact they are having in sharing and developing practice. We are proud of this extension of QSG reach deeper into MAT senior leadership, and this Report contains more on their increasing activity.

One of our speakers reminded us that collaboration builds confidence in yourself, your organisation and your sector. QSG members can face the future with confidence – and hope.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S. Taylor". The signature is stylized with a long horizontal line underneath.

**Steve Taylor**, Chair of QSG

# ORIGINS & PURPOSE

## Origins

A group of MAT CEOs began meeting informally in 2015 and then formed a network of Trusts which met regularly over the next three years. In 2018 this network became a formal, legal entity called the Queen Street Group, named after its first meeting location, the offices of the charity law firm Bates Wells. There were 17 original member Trusts. Membership has since grown to 36 Trusts, with more joining during 2023–2024.

## Purpose

QSG's formal legal object is "To advance education for the public benefit". We subscribe to particular collective values, based on common ethical standards in the provision of high-quality school education.

QSG does not seek to take a particular standpoint on any issue, neither does it lobby for a particular policy. Rather, it seeks to articulate the range of viewpoints of its members who serve very different communities throughout England. Our voice is grounded in the practical experience of leading schools and working with pupils.

## OUR TWO KEY AIMS

### Schools and their Trusts

To **improve the quality of education and opportunity** for all pupils in our schools through mutual intellectual, moral and practical challenge and support, and the implementation of best practice in the ethical and effective leadership of multi-academy trusts.

### Wider engagement

To **engage regularly with policy makers and regulators** to ensure that the practical perspective – both of those responsible for the day-to-day functioning of the schools' system and the views and experiences of our pupils – is understood and taken account of in their strategies and operations.



# VALUES & PRINCIPLES

## Ethical leadership and moral purpose

We seek to lead our Trusts in the best interests of all our pupils, especially the most disadvantaged, and so help to build a more just and equitable society.

## Thought grounded in practice

We are intellectually rigorous, positive, and constructive in how we seek to influence the development of education in Trusts and across the system. Our distinctive contribution is that our voice is grounded in the day-by-day practice of leading and managing successful groups of schools.

## Open and transparent

Through our website and publishing, both physical and virtual, we are open in the way we form and share our views.

## Eclectic and inclusive

All our members have a voice in how we operate. Our Expert Groups provide networks for leaders across all areas of Trust operation to share knowledge, develop professionally and influence policy.

## Multiple voices entwined in common purpose

Our Trusts are diverse in many ways, including geography, context and size. Each is accountable to its own Board and stakeholders. We seek to reflect and concentrate the impact of these multiple voices, not to condense them into a single viewpoint. We share a common conviction that all schools can benefit from being part of a multi-academy trust.



## Proactive and focused

We have no ambition to grow into a mass-membership organisation, nor do we feel the need to react to every shifting change or event in the educational world. We are proactive in focusing on the issues that experience in leading successful groups of schools tells us are of importance.

We support one another, improve our practice and seek to influence policy through:

- **Regular meetings of CEOs**
- **Regular meetings of Expert Groups involving Executive Leaders of Education, Finance, Human Resources, EdTech and Estates**
- **Discussions with influential policy-makers and regulators**
- **Publication of briefings and blogs**

During 2022–2023 we had three themes as areas of focus:

- **Supporting MATs to grow well**
- **Women into leadership**
- **MATs as leaders in their communities**

# QSG IN NUMBERS

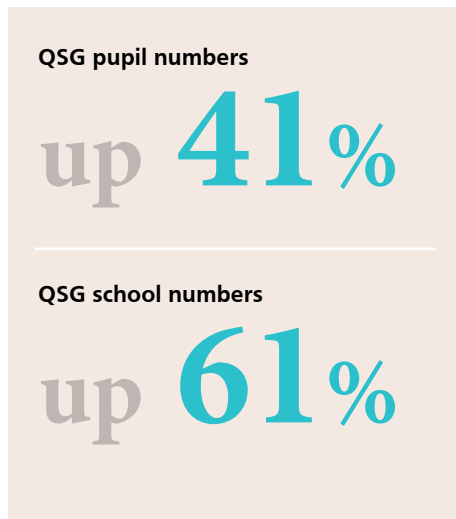
In 2022 – 2023 the numerical profile of QSG was as follows:

## QSG Trusts

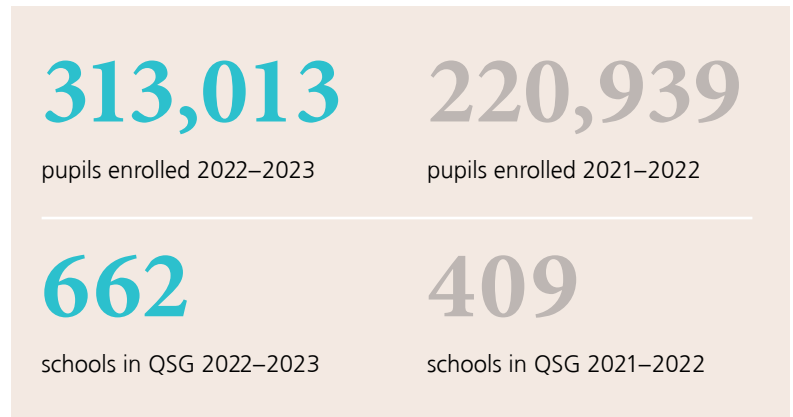


\*data is based on the 35 Trusts who were members for the full year. By the end of 2023 there were 36 members.

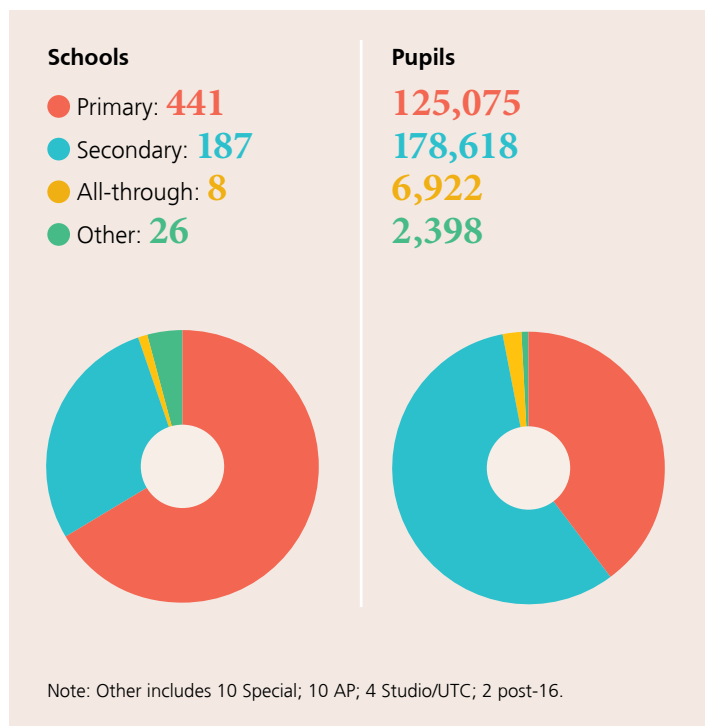
## Growth of QSG: 2021 – 2022 to 2022 – 2023



## Pupils and Schools



## QSG Schools and Pupils



## Trust Size: Spread

### Smallest (Olive Academies Trust)

**299** pupils across **5** schools in **4** local authorities

Olive operates Alternative Provision academies

### Largest (Ormiston Academies Trust)

**33,207** pupils across **43** schools in **18** local authorities

## Trust Size: Pupils

1,000 – 5,000 pupils

**7** Trusts

5,000 – 12,000 pupils

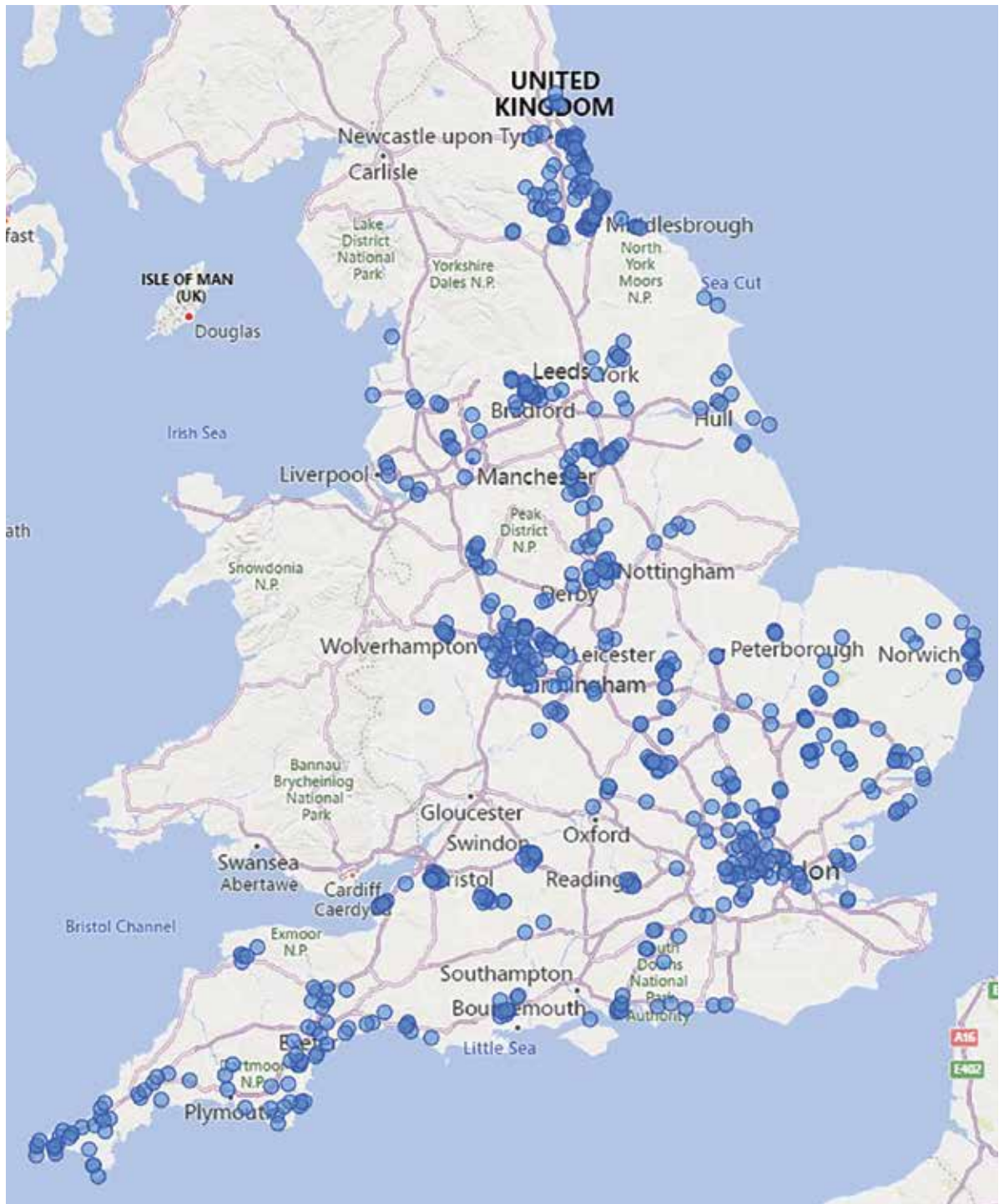
**19** Trusts

12,000 – 35,000 pupils

**9** Trusts



# GEOGRAPHY OF QSG SCHOOLS





# QSG SCHOOLS, PUPILS AND INSPECTION OUTCOMES

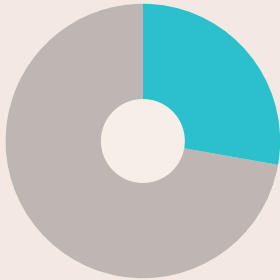
## Schools

Compared to England as a whole, schools in QSG Trusts are **much** more likely to be **sponsored academies** than in the average MAT

Proportion of sponsored academies to converter academies

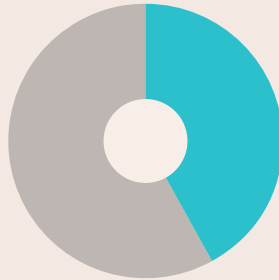
### England

● Sponsored: **28%**  
● Converter: **72%**



### Queen Street Group

● Sponsored: **42%**  
● Converter: **58%**



**This reflects the priority that QSG Trusts generally place on working to improve schools in challenging circumstances**

## School standards and inspection outcomes

Given the challenging circumstances of the schools which they operate, QSG Trusts are well above the national norm in strengthening educational quality

**Ofsted 'Good' or 'Outstanding' school inspection judgements:**

### QSG schools

**85%\***

where 42% of schools are a sponsored academy

### England

**87%**

where 28% of schools are a sponsored academy

\*inspected since joining a QSG trust

## Pupils

The pupils demographic across QSG schools indicates that, compared to the national picture, children in QSG Trusts are:

### More likely

- To qualify for the pupil premium
- Not to have English as their first language

# QSG ANNUAL RECEPTION

Each year, QSG holds a Reception for leading figures in English education. This event launches the QSG Annual Report which reviews the past year's activities, and sets priorities for the year ahead. It also allows the CEOs and Chairs of QSG Trusts to share their thinking with policy makers and discuss issues with leaders of other prominent educational organisations.

In 2022, the event was held at the Royal Society of Arts thanks to the generous sponsorship of Bates Wells. Among the 80 guests were representatives from the Department for Education; the Education and Skills Funding Agency and Ofsted.

Speaking on behalf of QSG, Steve Taylor (Chair of QSG) and Rowena Hackwood (Vice-Chair) reflected on the growth of QSG over the past year, and priorities for 2022–2023.

## QSG growth

➡ Reconstitution of the QSG Board, bringing new expertise from the CEOs of Education Endowment Foundation and Education Policy Institute and wider diversity of membership

➡ Growth from 22 to 36 Trusts, extending our reach to include Special Schools and Alternative Provision, extending our geographical coverage and diversity

➡ Formation of an executive team and improved back-office support to help QSG fulfil its aims

## Priorities for 2022 – 2023

### Supporting MATs to grow well

Establishing a programme to support the development of MATs by drawing on the collective experience of QSG

### Women into MAT leadership

Addressing the practical and perceptual barriers to women moving into leadership roles in education. We want to encourage authenticity in leadership, both male and female.

### MATs as leaders in their communities

Developing practical ways in which MATs can work with multi-agencies in their local communities to enhance wider provision for children

### QSG Expert Groups

QSG exists in order to improve the quality of education for all our pupils through mutual challenge and support, the implementation of best practice, and engagement with policy makers. The Expert Groups are the vehicle for ensuring that all QSG senior leaders can participate in fulfilling these aims.

This year we are adding new groups for Estates and EdTech to our existing groups in Finance, Education and HR. Additional back-office support is being provided to increase effectiveness of operation.



## Guest speaker

**David Withey**, CEO Education and Skills Funding Agency, emphasised a number of key points:

**The Bell Review**, to which QSG contributed, had two areas which stood out for him:

- **Clarity of roles and responsibilities** and addressing structural issues within ESFA
- The importance of **working in partnership** with the sector

His key words for ESFA are **certainty, simplicity, support**

## Certainty

- providing timely and accurate funding to the sector
- certainty about funding and clarity in the roles and responsibilities for the use of funding.
- launch of a prototype digital funding system, such as a DfE sign-in service, that will pave the way to extend services, already available to FE, to schools. For example, allocations can be presented on screen instead of exchanging documents

## Simplicity

- Not a one-size-fits-all; some schools may require a high level of specificity and structure from ESFA, others may not
- taking a fresh look at ESFA's financial regulations and the requests placed on academy trusts; only request information where this is absolutely needed

## Support

- ESFA wants to encourage a shift in perception away from 'policing' to enable a more supportive partnership relationship

**Also in attendance** at the QSG Reception were senior figures from:

*Action Tutoring; ASCL; Ambition Institute; Bates Wells; Catholic Education Service; Chartered Institute of Teaching; Coach Bright; Confederation of School Trusts; Early Education; Education Endowment Foundation; Education Policy Institute; Fair Education Alliance; National Governance Association; NFER; Pearson; PTI Education; Schoolsweek; TES*

# FOCUS 1: SUPPORTING MATS TO GROW WELL

Establishing a programme to support the development of MATs by drawing on the collective experience of QSG

QSG contributed to the thinking behind the White Paper “Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teaching for your child” (2022). We welcomed the recognition given to the difference that MATs can make in raising achievement, especially for disadvantaged pupils and communities.

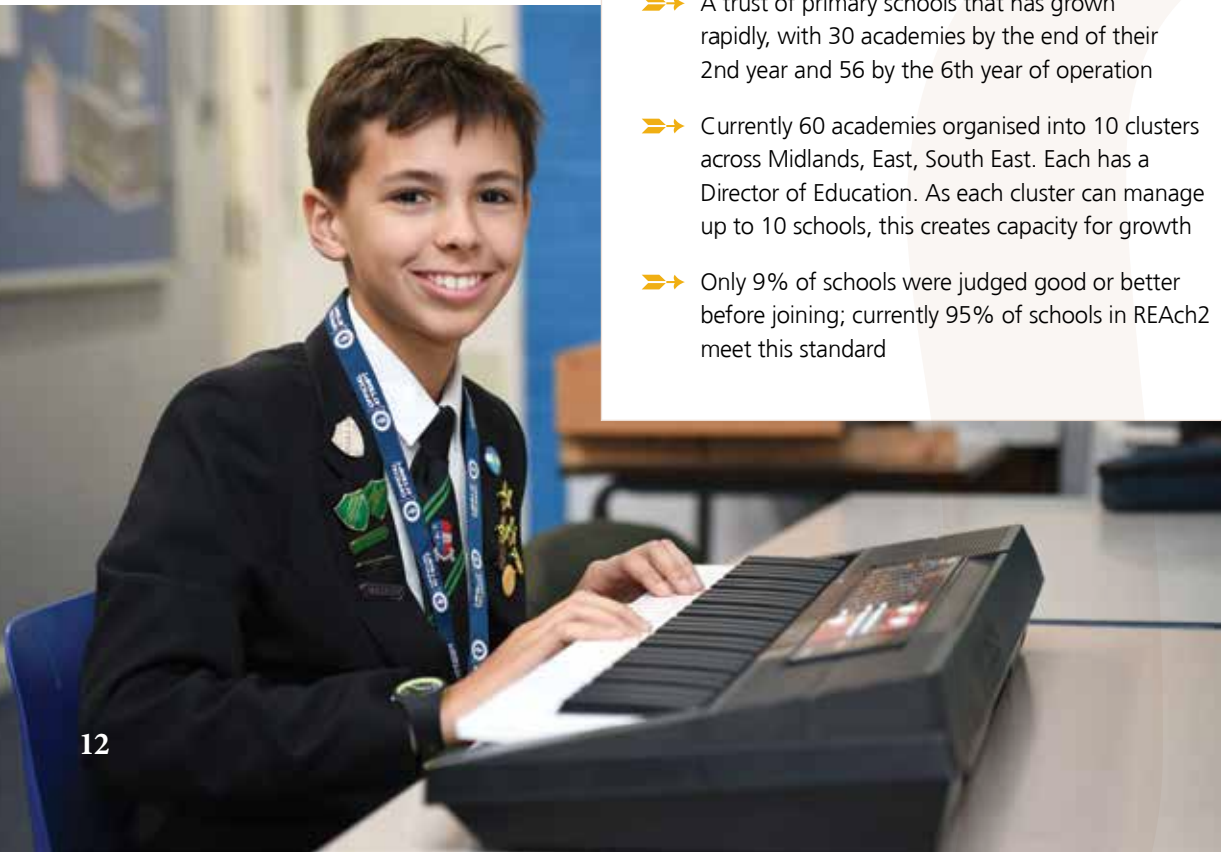
This focus was chosen because of the opportunity to draw on the collective experience of QSG MATs in support of the need for smaller MATs to grow in order to fulfil the objectives of the White Paper.

As we explored the focus, we broadened the scope of our discussions because:

- MATs are still young, dynamic organisations in varying stages of development
- Rapid growth is an issue whatever the size of the MAT
- Growth through merger raises distinctive issues

## Case study: REAch2 Academy Trust

- A trust of primary schools that has grown rapidly, with 30 academies by the end of their 2nd year and 56 by the 6th year of operation
- Currently 60 academies organised into 10 clusters across Midlands, East, South East. Each has a Director of Education. As each cluster can manage up to 10 schools, this creates capacity for growth
- Only 9% of schools were judged good or better before joining; currently 95% of schools in REAch2 meet this standard



## Creating a resource

QSG has created a resource base in order to enable member MATs to support one another and accelerate improvement. MATs share documents such as organisation charts, job descriptions of MAT roles and policies.

### Key learning points:

**i) Leading a MAT is challenging**

Growing a MAT is often like “building a plane while you are flying it”.

**ii) Establish core values**

Use these as a touchstone for everything that you do. Never apologise for justifying every action against these core aims and values.

**iii) Be clear to prospective members about what belonging to the MAT means**

Early MATs sometimes tried to present themselves as whatever prospective schools wanted them to be. With growth comes the confidence to be clear about the expectations of MAT members.

**iv) Build capacity ahead of demand**

It is difficult to do this in times of financial stringency, but essential in order immediately to add value to joining schools

**v) Carry out rigorous due diligence**

Whilst this is essential to manage risks, some larger MATs have greater capacity to accept risk. They accept that it is in the nature of failing schools to have risks that cannot always be foreseen. They accept these risks in the interests of improving the life-chances of the children in those broken schools.

**vi) Insist on strong governance from the start**

Act quickly to remove ineffective governors or structures.

**vii) Have a Plan B**

Unforeseen issues frequently emerge during onboarding or merger. Planning alternatives in case of worst-case scenarios is essential.

**viii) Build MAT culture**

An outstanding school has consistent approaches to learning and culture. The same must be true of the MAT.

## FOCUS 2: WOMEN INTO MAT LEADERSHIP

We aim to address the practical and perceptual barriers to women moving into leadership roles in education. We want to encourage authenticity in leadership, both male and female.

### Expert witness

**Hilary Spencer:** CEO Ambition Institute; formerly Director of Government Equalities Office

The numbers of women in education senior leadership do not reflect the gender balance of the school workforce. 70% of all jobs in the education sector are held by women. 85% of primary school teachers and 65% of secondary school teachers are women. 90% of teaching assistants are women, as are 81% of SEND teaching professionals.

Reliable figures for Trust CEOs are not easily available, but it seems likely that c.47% of Trust CEOs are women, (of which more than half are single academy trusts). One potential comparator is that 34% of the CEOs of the 100 biggest charities are women, compared to 65% of all charity CEOs.

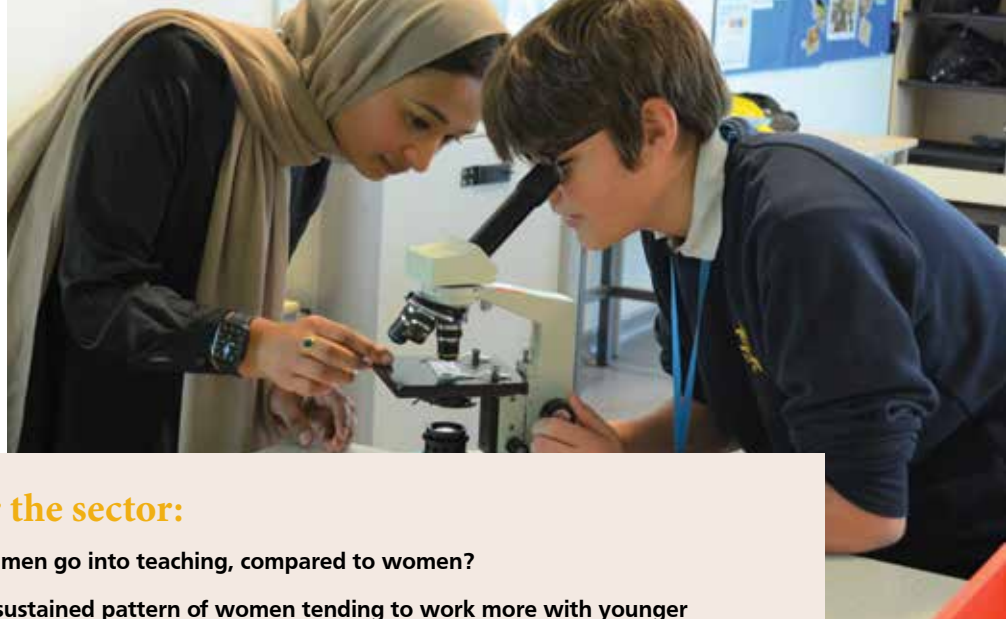
Women aged between 30 and 39 are leaving the profession in significant numbers, so the pipeline for future leaders is potentially reducing.

This focus area explores the barriers to female progression and how MATs can actively address them. It is the first step in considering the wider issue of how to create greater diversity in MAT leadership.

### Women into leadership conference

60 senior female and male MAT leaders met for the first QSG conference on this theme. The structure of the discussions and workshops modelled how to create diversity-friendly spaces which allow a plurality of voices to be heard. Issues explored included:

- making explicit where discrimination had been experienced by individuals
- advocacy for diversity and authenticity in leadership
- creating safe, low-ego spaces for debate and disagreement
- coaching and mentoring to support leadership journeys
- the impact of male allyship at a corporate level
- changing a culture where gender inequality is institutionalised
- presenting positive media perceptions of female leadership



## Questions for the sector:

- Why do so few men go into teaching, compared to women?
- Why is there a sustained pattern of women tending to work more with younger children and those with SEND, and men tending to work more with older children?
- What more could we do to support women and men to progress through their careers and into more senior roles at equal rates?
- What more can we do to help parents, particularly – but not only – women, stay in the sector?
- What can we learn from other sectors about what they have done to improve workforce equality?

## Actions we can take:

### Review selection processes

- Is the language used in job descriptions attractive or off-putting to different groups?
- What might be the biases of interviewers ?
- What weight do we give to experience or potential? Are we consistent in how we assess that for different candidates?

### Access to professional development

- Are men, women and different ethnic groups given equal access to leadership development?

### Options to offer greater flexibility

- Part-time, compressed hours, or job-share roles

- Flexible patterns, potentially including home-working for some aspects of the role
- Offering equal shared parental leave to men
- Reviewing pay
- Addressing the causes of any gender pay gap

### Set internal targets

- These have been shown to be more effective than those set externally

### Increase transparency

- Through all opportunities, progression, pay and reward processes
- Be consistent through structured interview processes

# FOCUS 3: MATS AS LEADERS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

Developing practical ways in which MATs can work with multi-agencies  
in their local communities to enhance wider provision for children

## Expert witnesses

**Kate Dodsworth**, Director of Consumer Rights  
at the Regulator for Social Housing

**Steve Owen-Hughes**, National President British  
Fire Services Association, and Head of Community  
Protection Surrey County Council 2010–2022

**James Townsend**, Director Strategy and Growth,  
Reach Foundation

**Nicola Noble**, Head of Surrey Square Primary  
School, Big Education Trust

**Philip Hamilton**, CEO Community Academies Trust

Schools are rooted in their communities. They are close to their parents and families, and they build close links with their stakeholders who are often represented on their governing bodies.

MATs are inevitably more distant. Some have taken a deliberate decision to work only with schools in a tight geographical area, whilst others have schools all over the country.

By inviting expert witnesses to our meetings and seminars, we want to explore how MATs can best work with local communities.

## Case study: Community Academies Trust

This is a model which harnesses the power and accountability of a Trust family of schools, whilst giving primacy to local governance and the Headteacher. It foregrounds the profile and identity of the school, rather than the Trust, in the local community.

### Vision:

➔➔ Education enables the highest level of social, academic and personal achievement to improve lives and leave your community and world better than you found it.

### Core principles:

➔➔ Ensuring excellence: Striving relentlessly for the best for the young people in our care and defining the six key features of an excellent Trust school.

➔➔ Community schooling: One of the six key features of an excellent Trust school, with clear Trust expectations of impact and local ownership of provision. An education that is built on an understanding of the pupils in the school and the lives they lead in their local community. A school that is anchored in the community and is part of its positive identity.

➔➔ Like-mindedness: Working as part of our fiercely loyal family of schools, supporting and challenging each other and understanding that the decisions we make impact on each other.



## Creating a resource

### Key learning points:

#### i) **MATs as a public service**

Schools often see themselves as clients of other public services which they call upon when needed. MATs have the weight and convening power to work strategically in partnership with other public services (such as health, social, housing, police) to provide leadership for communities.

#### ii) **MATs share with all public services the need to ask themselves three key questions in order to prioritise their resources:**

➔➔ **What must we do?** For example, meeting regulatory standards in education, H&S, finance, safeguarding. Reform often means overcoming vested interests.

➔➔ **What should we do?** These are often implied tasks, such as parent meetings, which have to be done more smartly as demand increases.

➔➔ **What do we want to do?** As morally driven organisations, the list is potentially endless. We have to justify the time and resource, and identify what else we are not doing as a result.

#### iii) **Benefits of collaboration**

Collaboration builds confidence in yourself, your organisation and your sector.

The pandemic forced many new collaborations between sectors because there was an urgent common purpose. We need to build on the learning from this.

#### iv) **Knowledge from other public services helps us better to support learners**

For example, collaboration with housing agencies foregrounds the barriers to learning caused by overcrowding, temporary accommodation, chaotic conditions in hostels, zero hours contracts and the consequent strain on families.

#### v) **Great schools are necessary but not sufficient for developing the full potential of their communities**

Schools are ideally placed for this work because they are a trusted universal service, visible and deeply rooted in their communities.

The Reach Foundation provides a model with its “cradle to career” programmes. Work from a pre-natal stage is important in creating the foundations for successful learners.

#### vi) **Supporting the basic needs of families is the necessary precursor for children to access learning**

Key principles in doing this successfully:

➔➔ put relationships at the heart of the work

➔➔ help stakeholders to identify their own interests

➔➔ understand that the solutions lie in the community

➔➔ co-create solutions: “do with” not “do to”

➔➔ be transparent in decision-making and communication

#### vii) **Use the influence of MATs**

QSG supports the School Food Reform campaign and Fair Education Alliance

# EXPERT GROUP (1)

## Education

**Chair: Dan Nicholls (Cabot Learning Federation)**

The Group has met six times this year. Each meeting has good attendance that represents the vast majority of Trusts within QSG. The attendees are typically Directors of Education for their Trust, or equivalent. There is a significant variation in what

that role entails, often reflecting the scale and maturity of the Trust. The group seeks to provide connection and support as well as considering contemporary issues and exploring longer term key strategic areas for Trusts.

### Key areas of focus for 2022 – 2023

#### 1) **School Improvement at scale**

In a number of meetings there has been an opportunity to consider how member Trusts employ their school improvement models to raise standards. Members of the group offered descriptions of how their Trust seeks to add value in this way. This involved a discussion about how Trusts make decisions on where to standardise, align and empower as well as considering quality assurance processes. This linked with pre-reading around Trust Dividend, which supported the thinking.

#### 2) **The post-pandemic disadvantage gap, and the impact of the cost-of-living crisis**

Across the meetings there was consideration of how best we support disadvantaged learners, particularly during the post-pandemic period. Several strategies were shared across the year, particularly in relation to attendance and how best to facilitate provision that closes gaps. Further discussion considered how well schools and Trust work with their communities.

#### 3) **Attendance post-pandemic**

Every meeting includes an update on the latest national attendance data and other research that is published related to improving attendance. We have also sought to understand the uneven impact of the pandemic within Trusts and across the country. A strength of the group is to provide a national perspective from members who work in every region.

#### 4) **SEND**

There has been some focus on SEND and how Trusts are best placed to support. This is an area for further focus in the next academic year.

#### 5) **Recruitment crisis and the securing the golden thread of CPD.**

There has been a focus on supporting ECTs within the Early Career Framework. This discussion also extended into trainee teachers and more broadly on recruitment and retention. Exploring how Trusts can improve both recruitment and retention of colleagues remains a key priority.

## Expert witness

**Lee Owston**, Acting Director of Education, Ofsted

Lee joined the meeting in May 2023 and gave an update on Ofsted and answered questions from the group. It was a very helpful and open conversation that touched on a number of areas. These included:

- the experiences of inspection and the variability in judgements experienced by the group
- the present framework emphasises Quality of Education and particularly the intent, implementation and impact of the curriculum; with the full return of national outcomes, we explored whether outcomes would become more important in judging impact
- the extent to which context is considered during inspection, particularly given the uneven impact of the pandemic
- concerns around the Ofsted appeals process
- the impact of inspection on the mental health and retention of colleagues
- an exploration of what may happen in the future with leadership at Ofsted and framework development

### Key emerging areas for focus, 2023 – 2024

- How do we ensure that as Trusts grow and merge, this leads to higher not lower standards? This seeks to further explore the School Improvement Models that Trusts employ to raise standards.
- How far can we take greater stewardship of the sector and seek to enable and support Trusts to work much closer together? This focuses on Trusts working closer together for all children and having a bigger collective impact on communities.
- How do we address the present challenges around attendance and the weakening social contract between families and education?
- How do we encourage stronger recruitment and retention, partly through the golden thread of professional development? We seek to support the sector and to develop a workforce able to meet the challenges of this decade.
- How do Trusts support disadvantaged learners and those identified as having SEND, ensuring that the value added by a Trust is felt by those who most need it?

## EXPERT GROUP (2)

### EdTech

**Chair: James Browning (Academies Enterprise Trust)**

One of the newer QSG Expert Groups, the EdTech Group has met three times, including a face-to-face meeting. It has explored five main topics this year:

- Approaches to forming a technology strategy
- Effective CPD and best practice sharing
- Data and cyber security
- The future of IT support
- Artificial Intelligence



### 1) **Approaches to forming a technology strategy**

There are two key elements to EdTech strategy: the appropriate infrastructure and its management.

One of the hidden benefits of a standardised MAT curriculum is the ability to plan more efficiently for the infrastructure needed to support its delivery. Technology can also mitigate some of the potential drawbacks of standardisation by enabling ready adaptation of the curriculum for the needs of individual pupils.

The focus of EdTech is always on the user. The culture of the Trust needs to be explicitly clear on what is standardised and what is decided at local level in order to give a clear steer to EdTech provision.

### 2) **Effective CPD and best practice sharing**

CPD in EdTech often focusses on the needs of teachers. The difficulty in recruiting and retaining skilled IT engineers has made even more important the need to have clear career pathways and appropriate training for new staff.

### 3) **Data and cyber security**

This has added urgency to the need to identify risks and mitigations in the light of increasing number of ransomware attacks. The group is working on two artefacts to support Trusts:

➡ A security best practice checklist, referenced to the Risk Protection Arrangement for schools and DfE guidance

➡ A cyber incident response plan template for Trusts to customise

### 4) **The future of IT support**

EdTech in schools is now both more widespread and more specialised. Trusts are responding by developing engineer expertise in specific areas such as cyber security, tenancy management, provision of EdTech support in the classroom. Apprenticeship schemes are being used. Cloud-based strategies are improving the ability to support. The increase in remote learning for pupils and working at home for some staff has placed new demands for support.

### 5) **Artificial Intelligence**

The view of the QSG group is that, in spite of the risks, AI can bring big benefits to schools. It will potentially transform the ability to tailor learning to the needs of the pupil. It will also have a major impact on the efficiency of back-office operations, for example automating tasks using flows to draft letters, tweets and web-pages. The immediate task is to encourage staff to start using models such as ChatGPT to generate familiarity and discussion.

## EXPERT GROUP (3)

### Estates

**Chair: Jon Ward (Creative Education Trust)**

The Group is recently established and has met four times this year, including a face-to-face meeting. The top five issues that it considers Trusts face are in the table below. It has engaged in extensive surveying of QSG members in order to benchmark practice against the DfE Good Estate Management Strategy (GEMS).

The Group is aiming in future to:

- create QSG purchasing frameworks, or partner with a specialist procurement organisation
- develop preferential services agreements for commonly procured services
- work with national supplier networks for services, works and buildings
- liaise with QSG EdTech Group on developing infrastructure arrangements



Issue	Strategic impact	Potential mitigations
<p><b>School Condition Allocation (SCA) funding available does not enable the Trust to deal comprehensively with the condition issues across the estate.</b></p>	<p>The planned investment strategies never match overall condition requirements and thus, the estate decays over time.</p> <p>There has to be a specific focus upon ensuring that statutory and Health and Safety requirements are met.</p>	<p>Our condition survey reporting must focus upon lifecycle, potential failure, H&amp;S, and the timescales for redress. It is important to highlight the need to rely upon our own condition reporting and to disaggregate from CDC reporting.</p> <p>Ensure available SCA funding is targeted towards the highest priority.</p>
<p><b>The Schools Rebuilding Programme (SRP) or other subsequent programmes does not extend to Trust assets that are now deemed beyond life. No clear timescales available for re-submissions of exceptional cases.</b></p>	<p>Lack of clarity as to whether the SRP will provide investment to failing assets means the SCA funding needs to be spread further and likely used for emergency improvements to keep schools open, safe, and operable.</p>	<p>To continue to plan for future bidding scenarios to SRP or the like. Maintain a clear and competent status position which details the deterioration of the aged asset.</p> <p>Use executive and board resources to review the investment decisions for aged assets.</p> <p>Ensure safety and compliance testing is up to date.</p>
<p><b>Capital funding available does not support required growth of students on roll, or changes to learning areas.</b></p>	<p>SCA funding should not be used for growth purposes.</p> <p>Schools require alternative sources of funding to support new classrooms, extended facilities, and resources.</p>	<p>Work with executives to discuss impact of growth arrangements and funding requirements.</p> <p>Work with schools to ensure budgets reflect additional space requirements.</p>
<p><b>Energy costs have risen significantly through much recent market turmoil.</b></p>	<p>The increased energy cost burden is prioritising emphasis on investments in capital to reduce consumption.</p> <p>Cultural change programmes to support sustainability are slow-burn.</p>	<p>It is important to balance investment decisions to ensure that essential systems and infrastructure are not compromised.</p> <p>Ensure sustainability strategy is discussed at executive level.</p>
<p><b>Prices are increasing for supply chain and contracted operational services across the estate.</b></p>	<p>Increases are being experienced because of supply chain constraints, pay and materials increases and profit-conscious suppliers. This depletes the investment impact of funding available.</p>	<p>Continue to review pricing, purchasing and procurement systems.</p> <p>Consider framework or volume purchasing opportunities. Ensure the most appropriate skills are available to the Trust to support effective procurement.</p>

# EXPERT GROUP (4)

## HR

### Chair: Angela Bull (Unity Schools Partnership)

The HR Group is very active, holding six meetings this year with high attendance from the majority of Trusts, indicating that looking after staff is an important priority for Trusts.

Discussions have focussed on strategic and operational issues. This year, sharing knowledge and actions for managing industrial action has been of particular mutual benefit.

### Priorities for 2022 – 2023

**The priorities set by the Group give a good indication of the spread and impact of the work of HR teams across MATs.**

**1) Organisational Design**

How best to create high performing teams that meet the needs of the MAT (see below).

**2) Staff Wellbeing**

Interventions to support health and well-being, build resilience, prevent and reduce staff stress, ensure work is a positive experience, and providing support where there are capability issues.

**3) Employee satisfaction and support**

Employing metrics so that the MAT knows its workforce and the impact of change; planned and effective professional development; talent management, succession planning and ensuring readiness for progression.

**4) Staffing cultures, including Equality, Diversity & Inclusion**

Meeting the growing demand for coaching and mentoring (including for

support staff, teachers and leaders) and ensuring a diverse and inclusive culture within a Trust's workforce.

**5) Pay and reward**

Investigating the differences in impact between those Trusts who disaggregate pay and performance and those who link it. Managing non-linear career progression routes; gender/ethnicity pay gaps; employee recognition programmes. Northern Education Trust presented a case study on harmonising support staff pay and conditions.

**6) Preparing for the future of HR**

Planning for the greater use of HR analytics, AI, strategic workforce planning; leading improvement, change and innovation; creating a sustainable workforce supply which meets the needs of the children in our schools now and for the future.



## Guest speaker

**Sinéad McBrearty**, CEO Education Support, whose work covers mental health and wellbeing



### Key focus discussion:

#### Organisational Design

HR has key impact in designing the organisation in order to build high-performing teams that meet the changing needs of MATs as they grow and as education changes. This entails balancing the needs of the organisation against those of the individual; recruiting and retaining staff in a context of financial strain; training and developing excellence in all staff.

#### 1) Human capability

Building human capability means developing people with talent who can deliver strategic goals. The organisation has a culture that links customer expectations to employee behaviours, and leaders whose actions build confidence. These human capabilities add value to pupils, stakeholders and communities and their nurturing is the prime function of HR teams in MATs.

#### 2) How can HR best add value to staff?

The majority of our HR teams feel they have impact by giving staff:

- a feeling of physical and psychological safety
- a sense of belief, meaning and purpose
- an ability to become better through learning and growth
- a feeling of belonging

#### 3) Key questions to ask of HR teams:

- a) Does your Trust have the right workforce competence and skills?
  - What are the vulnerable areas?
  - What strategic plans do you have to address those gaps?
- b) How does your trust ensure that you have the right leaders and shared leadership at all levels?
  - Is there a balance across all leaders?
  - What activities are you doing to support this?
- c) Does your trust have the right HR department, practices, metrics and people?
  - Trusts are significant employers which are changing rapidly in size and scale of operation. Does your Trust have an HR team that matches the best practice in the business sector?

Trusts shared their current practice and future work on leadership and line manager development; clear succession planning to ensure development of talent; developing agile central teams and HR structures to support Trust growth and the changing needs of the sector.

# EXPERT GROUP (5)

## Finance

### Chair: Sarah Lovell (Cabot Learning Federation)

Chief Finance Officers have met five times this year, including a face-to-face meeting in Birmingham. The high attendance of Trusts is a strong indicator of the value placed on these opportunities to

support and learn from one another as Trusts develop their practice in response to a challenging financial climate.

### Areas of focus this year

#### **Supporting QSG trusts as they grow**

This supports a key QSG theme. The Group has looked at how best to provide support through sharing systems, knowledge and peer mentoring (see below).

#### **Central team structures**

As Trusts develop, the Group shared how they differ, what key roles and teams they establish, and how they integrate systems and processes to drive efficiency and effectiveness.

#### **GAG pooling**

Discussions around the merits of GAG pooling, and how to mitigate some of the drawbacks.

#### **Funding streams**

How best to use new funding streams such as MSAG and TCAF.

#### **Financial planning**

Rarely has the financial weather changed so rapidly, with uncertainty from fuel increases, inflation, pay awards, funding and strikes. The Group shared knowledge and created a list of key budget assumptions for 2023–2024 to support Trusts in their financial planning. They were able to support each other in facing the challenges and creating innovative practice in response.

### Expert witness

**Tanya Arkle**, ESFA Deputy Director of School Resource Management

Tanya joined the face-to-face meeting and led discussion on ESFA's mission to provide Trusts with certainty of funding; the support through tools and guidance to help Trusts manage finance as efficiently as possible; processes of assurance to ensure taxpayers' money is used wisely.

A key topic discussed was how best to support financial staff in a context of budgetary pressures and competition for skilled staff. The issues include:

- providing CPD and career progression for finance staff
- hearing the CFO's voice at executive and governance levels
- establishing technical standards and targeted bursaries to meet need
- remodelling of SRMA scheme to enable commissioning to meet particular needs
- further development of ESFA advice and tools, for example with relation to developing flexible working in the organisation; managing cyber security; using benchmarking methodologies

## Supporting QSG Trusts as they grow

The discussions about how best to support Trusts as they grow have thrown into relief the complexity around their financial management. QSG has identified what can be done now, and aspirations for the future.

The Group is establishing a formal QSG Directory which identifies the areas in which Trusts might need support, and who in QSG is best placed to provide it. Examples of content:

- i) **Onboarding processes:** due diligence templates; the different issues involved with sponsored and converter academies; assessing the level of risk when taking in new schools and how best to mitigate this.
- ii) **Centralisation of finances:** a growing issue for Trusts, especially with a higher proportion of converter academies which may not wish to change processes that have historically worked well for them. Trusts can advise on how to design and implement centralised structures and systems that enable better financial control and efficiency.
- iii) **Procurement:** the ability to make savings follows from centralisation of systems. The group is ready to advise on all aspects of collective procurement of buildings, goods and services to drive quality and efficiency. This includes tender processes.
- iv) **New builds:** advice is available on all aspects of capital infrastructure.
- v) **Budgeting:** a more complex art this year, even without growth. Expertise is available on continual re-forecasting, achieving balance of staff/other costs, managing VAT and clarity of reporting to Trustees.

### Areas to explore next year:

- best practice for finance reporting and presenting data
- strategic capital planning
- setting a reserves policy
- sharing longer-term financial assumptions
- creating sustainable support staff pay structures in the light of recruitment and retention pressure and unfunded pay awards
- establishing schemes of financial delegation

As the decade unrolls, changes in learning and school organisation, in a context of funding pressure, will accelerate. QSG CFOs are committed to working together to drive necessary financial innovation.

# OFSTED

## How QSG has engaged with policy makers and regulators

### A crisis in confidence?

QSG is not a campaigning organisation, and neither does it lobby on behalf of a single viewpoint or policy. It reflects the thinking of its members, grounded in their lived experience of running schools across the country. At a meeting held in December 2022, the depth and breadth of concerns about Ofsted expressed by CEOs were sufficiently compelling to provoke a collation of experiences, and the identification of concerning trends.

### QSG response

QSG drew on the experience of its CEOs and schools to produce a paper which is summarised below. The paper identified five themes that Ofsted could address in order to improve the inspection system:

- Inconsistency of judgements
- Unfairness in the interpretation of evidence
- A lack of recognition of community and service provision context
- Practice not keeping pace with policy
- An ineffective and biased appeal system

A series of meetings were held with senior officials in both Ofsted and DfE. QSG offers a confidential and non-partisan forum. This enabled an honest sharing of actual experience and its impact on mental health, recruitment and retention of teachers and leaders.

### A summary of the QSG paper

#### 1) Inconsistency of judgements

The growth of Trusts that are developing common approaches to curriculum, pedagogy and behaviour across a number of schools throws into sharp relief where the judgement in one school is that an aspect requires improvement, whereas in others the same practice is judged good. This inconsistency extends to the evaluation of impact; it is increasingly hard to understand how this is done when inspectors routinely ignore published pupil outcome data.

#### 2) Unfairness in the interpretation of evidence

No-one disputes a judgement which is supported by a wide and fair evidence base. A major cause of frustration and anger for leaders is where practice undermines this principle. Such practices include instances where inspectors give undue weight to opinion and anecdote over objective evidence, such as when individual comments are allowed to override the evidence gathered in Ofsted's pupil/parent surveys, or in attendance and behaviour data. This privileges the voice of those with axes to grind, or who make comments carelessly, over that of the professionals for whom judgements have potentially career-limiting consequences.

Judgements need to be based on a holistic view of evidence, not allowing a single grain to tilt the balance of a weight of other evidence. A seeming high turnover of HMIs and inspectors is resulting in a number who lack senior leadership experience in schools, and lack the experience and permission to make sensible judgements based on overall context and evidence.

**3) A lack of recognition of community and service provision context**

Schools are experiencing a burgeoning of need on the part of their pupils. The causes include an increase in dysfunctional and inadequate parenting; post-pandemic pressures; increasing economic pressures; a greater societal awareness of mental health issues. At a time of massively increased demand, the availability of services is at best static and often decreasing. At the same time, expectations of behaviour of all pupils are rightly rising. Yet supply of Alternative Provision in many local authorities is woefully inadequate.

Inspectors expect schools to meet the needs of every child. This is increasingly impossible to achieve in the light of increased need and decreased provision. Schools are being held to account for a responsibility that they lack the power or resource to discharge. Leaders are frustrated by the unwillingness of inspectors to take these contextual factors into account, in effect blaming schools for what is beyond their control.

**4) Practice does not keep pace with policy**

The public pronouncements from HMCI recognise the profound changes in society wrought by the pandemic. She is right to recognise a breakdown in the social contract between parents and schools regarding expectations, for example, of attendance.

Inspectors criticise schools for low attendance. Whereas the reasons for this are accepted at a policy level as a wider social issue, at school level the practice on the part of inspectors is to see this as a school failure.

Whilst Ofsted was providing training on these wider matters for inspectors from September 2022, its impact was not fully felt in schools until its completion in February 2023.

**5) An ineffective and biased appeal system**

CEOs have little confidence in the system of appeals when they have complaints about practice. Ofsted is its own judge and jury. The response is invariably that the judgement is supported by the evidence base, with no independent scrutiny of whether this is justified. Heads are reluctant to raise issues during inspection because they are fearful that this will bring about a negative counter-reaction. We advocate a fairer, more transparent and independent system of investigating concerns.

# QSG BOARD 2022 – 2023



**Sir Andrew Carter**  
South Farnham  
Educational Trust



**Professor Becky Frances**  
CEO, Education  
Endowment Foundation



**Rowena Hackwood**  
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Ventrus  
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**Gary Chown**



Initio Academy Trust  
**Liz West**

# QSG

QUEEN STREET GROUP

## Thanks to those who have met with us this year:

**Susan Acland-Hood**

Permanent Secretary, DfE

**Tanya Arkle**

ESFA DD School Resource  
Management

**Baroness Barran**

Minister for Schools and Finance

**Kate Dodsworth**

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HMCI

**Hilary Spencer**

CEO, Ambition Institute

**James Townsend**

Director, Reach Foundation

**David Watson**

CEO, Venturers Trust

**David Withey**

CEO, ESFA

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