The Government's flawed case for a fully trust-led system

The Department for Education have published "The case for a fully trust-led system"[1] to justify their policy that all schools must join a multi-academy trust.

There is a lot of description of the spread of academies in England's schools. The statistical claims for the transformative impact of conversion to academy status is one part partial and the other part false.

Key NEU findings

- Maintained schools are more likely to improve their Ofsted rating to good or outstanding than sponsor-led academies.
- Sponsor-led academies are more than twice as likely to have their Ofsted rating downgraded to requires improvement or serious weaknesses than maintained schools.
- The document misreports Ofsted ratings for schools by governance type.
- The document hides the contextual information for the test and GCSE results for schools by governance types.

[1] The case for a fully trust-led system, page 1, Department for Education https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1063615/The_case_for_a_fully_trust-led_system__web_.pdf

Ofsted ratings of sponsor-led academies

The most important claim in this document is:

> *"Where schools underperformed, they were increasingly transferred into multi academy trusts (MATs) as sponsored academies. The impact has been transformative - **more than 7 out of 10 sponsored academies are now rated Good or Outstanding compared to about 1 in 10 of the local authority maintained schools they replaced**".*

The Department are so impressed by this claim that they have put it in bold on page one. It is nothing like as compelling as the Department claim since **nine out of ten maintained schools are also rated as Good or Outstanding** (Table 1).

This is not a fair comparison, because a larger proportion of sponsor-led academies were previously rated as less than good. However, for a fair comparison, we can compare like with like:

- 90% of maintained schools that were previously rated as less than good improved to being good or outstanding (Equation 1). Whereas only 74% of sponsor-led academies improved to good or outstanding (Equation 3).
- 11% of maintained schools that are currently rated as less than good were previously good or outstanding (Equation 2). Whereas 28% of sponsor-led academies were downgraded (Equation 4).

Maintained schools		**Previously good or better**	**Previously less than good**	**Previously good or better**	**Previously less than good**
Current Ofsted	**Good or better**	8,773	5,627	54%	35%
	Less than good	1,120	601	7%	4%

Table 1: Ofsted judgements of maintained schools

Equation 1: Mainstream maintained schools previously rated as good or outstanding downgraded to requires improvement or poor

$$X = \frac{5627}{5627+601} = 90\%$$

Equation 2: Mainstream maintained schools previously rated as requires improvement or poor improved to good or outstanding

$$Y = \frac{1120}{8773+1120} = 11\%$$

Sponsor-led academies		Previously good or better	Previously less than good	Previously good or better	Previously less than good
Current Ofsted	**Good or better**	263	987	15%	58%
	Less than good	100	352	6%	21%

Table 2: Ofsted ratings of sponsor-led academies

Equation 3: Sponsor-led academies previously rated as requires improvement or poor improved to good or outstanding

$$X = \frac{987}{987+352} = 74\%$$

Equation 4: Sponsor-led academies previously rated as good or outstanding downgraded to requires improvement or poor

$$Y = \frac{100}{263+100} = 28\%$$

Ofsted tables

The tables 5 and 6 on pages 15 and 16 of the paper report the last Ofsted rating for schools, but since the Ofsted inspection many schools have changed their governance with many maintained schools joining MATs. These tables ought to report the governance of schools when the inspection was carried out.

Test and exam results

"*The performance of LA maintained schools, SATs and MATs varies, with the latter incorporating sponsored academies. These schools typically suffered from low attainment as under-performing local authority schools and often have a higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils. Single academy trusts converted as Good and Outstanding schools and thus were more likely to be high performing.*

*"Despite this**, the best MATs transform outcomes for pupils, particularly the most disadvantaged,** and deliver improvement in schools and areas where poor performance had become entrenched. If all pupils did as well in reading, writing and maths at key stage 2 in 2019 as pupils in the MAT performing at the 75th percentile of MATs, national performance would have been 8 percentage points higher at 73%. At the 90th percentile this would have been 79%.*

For disadvantaged pupils, the increases would have been even greater – 10 percentage points at the 75th percentile and 19 percentage points at the 90th. The strongest trusts are relentlessly focused on using their expertise and resources to cater to the needs of all pupils, especially disadvantaged children or children with SEND. MATs can pool resource and expertise to benefit children with SEND. They can ensure interventions are in place to improve outcomes and offer effective support and pastoral care to ensure no pupil is left behind. "[2]

[2] The case for a fully trust-led system, page 17, Department for Education https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1063615/The_case_for_a_fully_trust-led_system__web_.pdf

The DfE have not published a methodology paper, so we are unsure whether the paper has reported the exam results of the current governance of schools or the governance when the tests were carried out. We have created the tables reporting the governance arrangements of the schools the pupils were in when the tests were conducted. We have added crucial missing contextual information.

		10th percentile	25th percentile	50th percentile	75th percentile	90th percentile
Proportion of pupils achieving the expected level	**LAs**	61%	62%	65%	69%	73%
	MATs	50%	57%	64%	71%	79%
	SATs	48%	59%	69%	77%	85%
Proportion of disadvantaged pupils	**LAs**	36%	34%	34%	34%	34%
	MATs	47%	41%	36%	32%	29%
	SATs	34%	32%	28%	23%	23%
Average number of pupils sitting exam	**LAs**	1,411	2,073	2,090	1,741	1,534
	MATs	92	147	174	131	110
	SATs	58	60	64	64	62

Table 3: Key stage 2: LA, MAT and SAT average percentage of pupils reaching expected standard in reading, writing and maths

In the first paragraph the DfE claim that more pupils in MATs are disadvantaged than in maintained schools. In 2019, the last time children took national tests, 34% of pupils in maintained schools were disadvantaged, 36% in MATs and 28% in SATs. The relative levels of disadvantage are reflected in the proportion of 11-year-olds who achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and maths. On average, 65% of 11-year-olds in maintained primary schools reached the expected standard in reading, writing and maths, 64% in MATs and 69% in SATs (Table 3).

In the second paragraph, the DfE claim that "the best MATs transform outcomes for pupils, particularly the most disadvantaged, and deliver improvement in schools and areas where poor performance had become entrenched". What they fail to point out is that the best performing MATs have a lower proportion of disadvantaged pupils, and conversely the worst performing MATs have far more disadvantaged pupils. The top 10% of MATs have only 29% of pupils who are disadvantaged, whereas the bottom 10% of MATs have 47% of their pupils who are disadvantaged (Table 3).

There is far greater social segregation within MATs because they are much smaller than local authorities, the average number of pupils taking Key Stage 2 tests in a MAT was 174, whereas the average number of pupils taking tests in a local authority was 2,090 (Table 3). This also explains the greater variation in the achievement of pupils in MATs compared with local authorities. There was a 29% difference in achievement between the top and bottom MATs compared with a 12% difference between the top and bottom LAs (Table 3).

		10th percentile	25th percentile	50th percentile	75th percentile	90th percentile
Proportion of disadvantaged pupils achieving the expected level	**LAs**	43%	48%	53%	57%	64%
	MATs	33%	43%	51%	61%	71%
	SATs	27%	41%	54%	69%	81%
Proportion of disadvantaged pupils	**LAs**	25%	29%	34%	38%	37%
	MATs	28%	33%	36%	38%	35%
	SATs	23%	25%	28%	27%	26%
Average number of pupils sitting exam	**LAs**	1,340	2,008	2,090	1,683	1,986
	MATs	81	133	174	151	105
	SATs	57	65	64	61	57

Table 4: Key stage 2: LA, MAT and SAT average percentage of pupils eligible for pupil premium reaching expected standard in reading, writing and maths

The paper claims, "the best MATs transform outcomes for pupils, particularly the most disadvantaged"; however, what they do not say is that they re-sorted the MATs to find a new group of best MATs for results for disadvantaged pupils. The sentence implies there is just one set of best MATs.

A higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils achieve the expected standards in reading, writing and maths in LAs, 53%, than in MATs, 51% (Table 4). The smaller size of MATs and SATs also explains the greater variation in the achievement of pupils in MATs and SATs. The difference in achievement between the top MATs and bottom MATs is 38%, whereas the difference in LAs is 21% (Table 4).

As in primary schools, poverty plays a major role in determining the achievement of pupils at secondary schools, but an additional factor is selective education. Pupils at selective schools achieve higher results than pupils at non-selective schools because the pupils have been selected for their academic achievement. The Progress 8 measure overstates grammar school performance[3].

In addition, to the relatively small size of MATs increasing variation, so the best MATs performing better than the top LAs and the worst MATs performing worse than the worst LAs, due to their relative size; and the best MATs having a lower proportion of disadvantaged pupils than the best LAs. The best MATs also have more pupils attending selective schools than the best LAs. 6% of pupils in the top 25 per cent of MATs attend grammar schools compared with just 1% of pupils in the top 25% of LAs (Table 5). 9% of pupils in the top 10 per cent of MATs attend selective schools compared with only 4% of pupils in the top LAs. This pattern is then repeated for disadvantaged pupils (Table 6).

[3] Progress 8 is too favourable to grammar schools and understates secondary modern achievement, September 2016, FFT Education Datalab https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/2016/09/progress-8-is-too-favourable-to-grammar-schools-and-understates-secondary-modern-achievement/

		10th percentile	25th percentile	50th percentile	75th percentile	90th percentile
Progress 8 score	**LAs**	-0.35	-0.19	-0.03	0.13	0.26
	MATs	-0.48	-0.23	0.00	0.26	0.49
	SATs	-0.52	-0.22	0.04	0.37	0.67
Proportion of disadvantaged pupils	**LAs**	36%	32%	28%	31%	30%
	MATs	35%	33%	28%	25%	24%
	SATs	31%	26%	21%	17%	17%
Proportion of pupils attending selective schools	**LAs**	2%	0%	2%	1%	4%
	MATs	2%	1%	2%	6%	9%
	SATs	0%	1%	8%	23%	27%
Average number of pupils sitting exam	**LAs**	547	809	924	959	889
	MATs	247	337	356	292	232
	SATs	118	145	164	162	148

Table 5: Key stage 4: LA, MAT and SAT average Progress 8 score

		10th percentile	25th percentile	50th percentile	75th percentile	90th percentile
Progress 8 score	**LAs**	-0.81	-0.67	-0.48	-0.20	0.09
	MATs	-0.91	-0.67	-0.41	-0.11	0.23
	SATs	-0.96	-0.68	-0.34	-0.02	0.41
Proportion of disadvantaged pupils	**LAs**	22%	24%	28%	39%	33%
	MATs	30%	27%	28%	29%	30%
	SATs	23%	22%	21%	20%	20%
Proportion of pupils attending selective schools	**LAs**	1%	4%	2%	2%	2%
	MATs	2%	1%	2%	5%	8%
	SATs	3%	3%	8%	26%	39%
Average number of pupils sitting exam	**LAs**	840	823	924	829	609
	MATs	257	307	356	326	264
	SATs	132	154	164	155	149

Table 6: Key stage 4: LA, MAT and SAT average Progress 8 score for pupils eligible for pupil premium

Source files

The Python code used to generate this analysis and the spreadsheets referenced in this document are available at https://github.com/ajb1970/exams-by-governance.