

# Multi-academy trust interview:

## Bob Anderson, Director of HR and Governance at The Elliot Foundation

The Elliot Foundation currently has 18 open academies which are responsible for the education of 6,000 pupils in total. All of the academies in the foundation have membership of The Key for School Leaders and The Key for School Governors.

### What challenges do you face as a MAT director?

When we first started out, many of the academies that we worked with were community schools and it was initially difficult for principals to understand that the Trust board is essentially the governing body. As community schools, they had the freedom to set their own policies and this was something that it was tricky to get out of the habit of doing. Now it is more clearly understood how policy setting is managed and it's generally seen positively as it frees principals up to focus on what is most important – teaching and learning.

Another initial challenge for me was the number of different providers that the academies were using – at one stage we had eight different HR and payroll providers for academies around the country and communicating with them all was really frustrating and difficult. Now we've consolidated this work and we're dealing with one provider, which means that we have a single source of staffing information and greater consistency.

### How do you prove to Ofsted that you are improving your academies?

The obvious way of doing this is through pupil performance, which is something that inspectors will look at even before they arrive at the academy. We are proud that currently 80% of our academies are good or outstanding despite them being in areas of high deprivation.

I think that academy improvement is centred on good relationships between principals and the Trust and the right level of support and guidance.

We want to ensure that there is clarity and consistency in this relationship and we also realise that what works in one academy will not necessarily work in another. This is why we focus on bespoke support to each academy and, going forward, to each individual governing body.

At the same time, as a Trust we consistently ensure that we're compliant with Ofsted from a policy perspective. For example, at the moment, we are preparing a protocol on recruitment and DBS checks which will include advice on the single central record.

### How has membership of The Key supported you and your academies?

The Key has made a significant and positive difference both to my work and the work of academy leaders and governors. The Key's services are the first stop for them if they have a question related to their role or if they don't understand something they're working on.

It's great because it gives academy leaders and academy governors a certain amount of independence to problem solve. The case studies that the service provides also give them a really valuable understanding of how other schools and academies are doing things, and solutions that have worked for them.

“The questions that school leaders and governors now come to the Trust with are much more focussed, which means that it saves us time and therefore money.”

