



Julian Cacchioli, the Chair of Governors at Grove Road outlines below how Grove Road governors made the transition to Academy status and what it felt like from a governor's perspective.

Like all local schools, Grove Road Primary School's governing body is made up of a group of committed and passionate individuals from a wide variety of disciplines, industries and backgrounds, all of whom bring a rich and creative perspective to the challenges and opportunities that face our school. We don't always agree on how to get there, and there is a lot of healthy debate, but the one goal we all share is to ensure the very best education experience for the children.

It is within this context – and against a backdrop of uncertainty and shrinking school budgets - that we approached the decision of whether we should join a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT). So began a period of intensive due diligence, as we looked at the pros and cons of the different MATs available. We held many, many hours of meetings, some of which turned into quite “healthy debates”. We spoke to people who had already been through the process and we spoke to those with external expertise. We also spent a lot of time listening to the parents and responding to their concerns. This was key in making the process even more robust, as they held us to account throughout. It is important to note, that right up until the final decision was made, the option of not joining a MAT was always on the table.

Ultimately, with all the facts in front of us, we took the decision to convert to academy status and join the local MAT (which was later to become the Ridgeway Learning Partnership). We believed that the local synergies between schools would bring the best benefits around transition, and the commitment of all involved convinced us that this decision would achieve our goal of ensuring the best possible education for our children for the long-term future.

Were we right?

In June of last year, we commissioned an independent external review to ensure that the benefits we identified at the outset were actually being realised. And they were. The review identified great progress had already been made in collaboration across all areas, between Grove Road and Tring School. Teaching and non-teaching staff reported a very positive experience. As a governing body, we have a great working relationship with the RLP Trustees and we are now able to focus on student outcomes and strategic priorities for our school, with many of the procedural administration duties now being picked up by RLP. Most importantly, the students told us their learning experience was so much better, and this was also reflected in some of the metrics we were seeing.

As a governing body, the experience of the past 2 years was invaluable. It was a lot of hard work – and all the governors and school leaders involved deserve huge credit for the time and effort they committed to the process – but it gave us a unique opportunity to really shape our school's strategic future in a positive way.

When we, as a governing body, took the decision to convert to an academy and join the RLP, we believed it would provide the very best future for the school and the best opportunities for the children through increased financial stability and enhanced teaching, particularly across the transition from Year 6 to Year 7. Throughout the whole process we had one guiding principle: what is the best thing for our children and our teachers? The progress already made as part of the RLP exceeds our expectations, but there is much more we want to do. We believe that, as more schools join the RLP, the benefits to all will increase exponentially, and we look to the future with excitement and confidence.





Julian Crane, a Trustee Director of the Ridgeway Learning Partnership and former Chair of Governors at Grove Road Primary School, reflects on the first year of the MAT.

When I was asked to write an article for the RLP first anniversary update, three words came to mind. No, not those ones...but hindsight-insight-foresight.

Hindsight - How did we get here?

It is well documented elsewhere how, after months of discussion with other local schools, healthy debate and due diligence, the Grove Road Governing Body decided to join the RLP, as the best way to protect the strengths of the school whilst addressing the challenges faced by a changing education landscape, shrinking budgets and a diminishing role for the local authority.

Just as creating a local MAT with Tring School represented a great opportunity for Grove Road, joining the Board of Trustees represented a great opportunity personally; to demonstrate my belief and commitment to the MAT, and help the Trustee Board deliver on the shared vision of both schools, balancing primary and secondary interests within a single governance model. I felt a great sense of responsibility to ensure Grove Road wasn't swallowed whole by its much larger neighbour or rebranded Tring School (Grove Road branch)!!

Insight – Where are we now?

To be honest, occasionally during the first year, it seemed to be taking a long time to define a new governance structure and implement new ways of working. Sometimes, having only two schools in the MAT seemed like a mixed blessing. Whilst the flexibility to be able to run some processes in parallel ensured nothing slipped between the cracks. The commitment and dedication of governors and trustees to handle dual running resulted in transitional arrangements remaining in place for longer than might otherwise have been possible. However, the secret to success is to learn from mistakes and, through experience, trustees and governors now have an effective governance structure and a very good appreciation and understanding of what works well and pitfalls to avoid when schools join a MAT.

But more importantly, we are already seeing the impact on what really matters – student outcomes and quality of teaching. Self-evaluation shows that students feel better prepared for secondary school and settle more quickly. Staff across both schools are enjoying the opportunity to collaborate and are benefiting from increased awareness and understanding of expectations and student achievements across both schools.

Furthermore, the MAT has received external validation of its internal assessment. Trustees were delighted with the progress and impact identified by Helen Jones, Education Consultant & Ofsted Inspector, when she reviewed the MAT in June 2018.

Foresight – Looking forwards

So, is it too late for other schools to join the RLP? Absolutely not. In fact, it's probably the perfect time. A lot of the heavy lifting has been completed and an effective governance structure has been implemented, one that not only meets current requirements but has also been designed with the future in mind.

Having started to see the impact of the MAT on students and staff, it is now time to start spreading the news and sharing the RLP story. The ambition is to grow the MAT in a controlled and sustainable manner, by adding like-minded local schools, so that more young people in the local community can benefit from the opportunities that the MAT provides and achieve their full potential.

I am very excited about the future for the Ridgeway Learning Partnership and look forward to sharing the next chapter of the RLP story with you shortly.

If you would like to find out more about the Ridgeway Learning Partnership and the journey to Multi-Academy Trust status please contact Janis Donald, Chair of Trustees

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