

# Intelligent Growth



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Explore the challenges of growth and ensure that you are growing from a child- and community-centric perspective



# Introduction



# Track record & impact

- Executive Head of GLF Schools – 2012 to 2015 – 14 schools at this point
- CEO – full time (1.9.2015 to 31.12.2023)
- Led trust of 2 schools in 2012; 42 schools in 2022 – informal growth strategy to a formal growth strategy
- All 42 schools had an Ofsted judgement; 40 are at least ‘good’, including 7 sponsored academies and 11 brand new schools (9 primary, 2 secondary). 12 ‘outstanding’
- All 35 primary schools are rated as at least ‘good’



# Definitions



# Informal and formal growth

My experience as a trust leader:

- Informal growth, based on existing professional relationships at headship level, moving towards a more formal growth strategy

Your experience today as a (new) trust leader:

- A (inherited) formal growth strategy, that needs to be updated regularly



# Growth, merger and acquisition

| Growth   | Merger   | Acquisition   |
|--|--|---|
| The addition of a maintained school to the academy trust   | Two trusts of similar size legally joining together as a larger trust, usually under a new name with a new leadership (shadow) structure | Single academies or small trusts joining a larger trust, which retains its name |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• School becomes an academy</li><li>• Same as the majority of schools since 2010</li></ul> | Trust mergers give today's CEOs a different set of leadership challenges (compared to the first wave of CEOs)                            | Repetition of previous experience of becoming an academy                        |



# The reality of Intelligent Growth



# A Balancing Act

- Increase your capability in specific areas e.g., SEND
- Refresh ideas and avoid stagnation
- Duty to improve education for more
- Efficiencies through scale
- Improve support for your outliers
- DfE/RD want your help

- Your capacity and capability
- Funding challenges
- Potential management distraction
- Impact on culture and communication
- Impact on structure

Drivers

Inhibitors



# Context

## Current Signals

- Further academisation is still possible (50 new academies on 1/11/24)
- Consolidation of SATs and smaller MATs continues
- Indicators that growth of your trust would be welcome or encouraged

## Implications

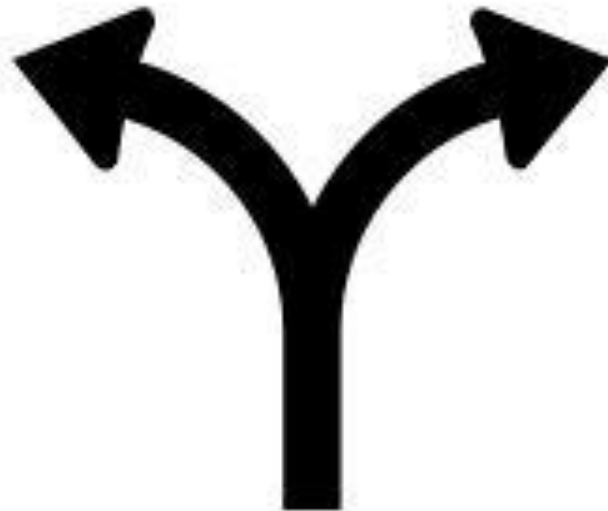
- Opportunity / Pressure to grow (from whom?)
- Timescale? 12-18 months?



# The Fork in the Road

Your ambitious instincts  
are leading:

Higher risk, higher growth



Your conservative instincts  
are leading:

Lower risk, lower growth

Impact on staff and *children*?



# The Middle Way – Be Growth Ready

- You have time: probably 18-24 months.
- You should aim to grow to
  - improve the education for more children
  - improve the education to our existing children
  - increase the opportunities for our staff
- We cannot ignore the challenges
  - Capacity and funding
  - Keeping your trust *your* trust

So:

- Approach growth positively
- Be determined and creative

But:

- Be honest with yourselves
- Be disciplined in your assessments of fit/capability/capacity



# Some parameters

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| Maximum size      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● None. No basis on which to pick any particular number</li><li>● Review our size as we grow and recognise when our structure needs a step change</li><li>● Consider impact of small schools</li></ul>             |
| Geography         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Yes to new areas in present region - subject to sufficient local footprint</li><li>● National presence?</li><li>● Some in-person interaction is needed even with the advances in the use of technology</li></ul> |
| Structure         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Growth at scale needs to be led by a dedicated person/small team</li><li>● How can you fund this considering October's announcement?</li></ul>   |
| Short term growth | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Small-scale short-term growth OK on the current basis</li></ul>  |



# The reality of Intelligent Growth: from *your* trust's perspective



What *your* leaders and trustees may decide...



# Considerations before we grow\*

- Are all our current schools 'good'?
- Is our operating model as efficient and effective as it could be?
- Do we understand what we are currently good at? Can we evidence it?
- What have been the benefits of growth so far?
- To what extent do we want to 'trust-brand' any incoming schools? What does this look like?
  
- We need a clear message/understanding of what we want to be really good at (our Trust Dividend)

*\*beware the echo chamber*



# Approach to Growth: becoming growth ready\*

- Understand what our key added value is. How can growth help us to improve it?
- Refine and enhance our operating model for maximum efficiency/effectiveness.  
Understand how new schools would fit in.
- Undertake a full and frank appraisal of our capability to grow and establish the actions needed to be growth-ready.
- Look at our culture, how well established it is, how it can be transmitted to (or shared with) new joiners.
- Develop a growth proposition that sets out the driver for growth, our value-added, the benefits envisaged, the investment required to be successful and the plan to put it in place.

*\*beware the echo chamber*



# Next steps\*

## 1. Set up a working party

- Purpose: to undertake the activities on the previous slide and produce *your* growth proposition
- Timescale: start now (November 2024) and complete by end of March 2025

## 2. Lobby externally

- Purpose: to try and raise awareness of the issues with growth at scale, and perhaps access some assistance
- Timescale: start asap and continue

## 3. Develop a positive growth narrative

- Purpose: to prepare people internally for growth and to gain buy-in
- Timescale: consider the messages as part of the working party; begin wider comms once growth proposition agreed.

*\*beware the echo chamber*



**However...**



**Intelligent Growth: I suggest that you should  
*also* look at growth via an alternative lens**



# You want *my* school/trust?

## Look at growth from the opposite angle

- Why my school? Or why my trust (single or multi)?
- Will I still be head? Or CEO/trust leader? Would I TUPE across?
- What would we gain? Why give up my autonomy?
- Will teachers teach or read from a centrally devised script?
- How large would you want your trust to be? Why? What's the benefit of increasing your size that much? Big = better? Er, really?
- What is the driver for more, for you as CEO or a trust leader?
- Are you following the crowd or are you an individual with your own thinking?
- Rural vs urban?
- How does our school joining make your trust more financially sustainable?

**CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE and the COMMUNITY – not mentioned...!**



# You want *my* school/trust - what is *your* impact?

## Let's start with CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE and the COMMUNITY

1. What is your phonics screening % in Year 1? Is it on an upward trend?
2. What is the RWM percentage across your primaries at KS2? What is the range? What is the increase in RWM at your highest performing primary? And your lowest?
3. What is your P8 figure in your schools? In your most established schools (ie 3 years +)?
4. What is the % of students progressing into higher education from your 6<sup>th</sup> form? Range?



# You want *my* school/trust - what is *your* impact?

## Let's start with CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE and the COMMUNITY

5. How do vulnerable children and young people perform in relation to q.1-4?
6. What is attendance like? In 2018-19 (autumn and spring terms) PA = 10.5%; 22-23 = 21.2%; 2023-24 = 19.2%. Range? PA? DV? PA for DV? PA for SEND? What is your mobility like (and range)? How have you improved so much? Why haven't you tackled it effectively yet?
7. What do children and young people say? What do parents say? What do governors and trustees say? What do other stakeholders and community partners say? What is staff retention looking like?
8. Where are the gaps and how will growth and/or merging support this? How does my/our school/trust fit in?



**Where is your Trust (Positive) Impact evidence?**



# Questions

1. What do you believe is your most attractive feature, as a trust, for others considering joining?
2. How do you know?
3. How do you make sure that you are not leading within an echo chamber?  
How do you network? How do you collaborate?
4. How do you keep your children, young people and community at the heart of all trust decision-making?



# Summary



# Principles of Surrey Education Partnership Board



- Children
- Community
  
- CULTURE+6
- FOR 2 ↑



***TT5 – “Preserve the best, improve the rest”***

***TT4 – Collaboration is about connection***

***TT3 – Be consistent, be clear, be courteous***



Chris Donnelly

**“One of the healthiest habits to learn:  
Take nothing personally.”**

