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Data—a *strategic* issue for MATs and schools

Key Points

1. **A data strategy?**
2. **Ensure the correct data is being captured**
3. **Identify and monitor any interventions**
4. **Add comparative data sources**
5. **Set up a strategic data group**
6. **Invest in suitable data analytics**

Data can be an effective strategic tool to help leaders to achieve their objectives and provide strong governance for their schools.

1   A data strategy?

The first step in using data correctly, is drawing up a strategic plan for how to use the data that is found within your multi-academy trust (MAT); this provides a framework to ensure the data that school leaders are looking at is both relevant and up-to-date.

An effective strategic data plan will help to:

– Identify priorities, e.g. collecting, storing and reporting

– Increase data awareness, creating the 'buy-in' to get staff on board

– Create a centralised policy for procurement

– Set the direction for data in line with the new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

– Produce meaningful information

– Ensure data is collected once but used multiple times

This strategic plan will support the MAT and school to use their data to:

– Inspire new initiatives by uncovering trends

– Identify underachievement and support

interventions

- Promote and share the impact of good teaching and learning

- Create a robust focus on tracking and monitoring of individual pupil progress

- Ensure forensic use of assessment data for progress tracking and target setting

- Support the optimum allocation of staffing and resources

- Build up realistic profiles of individual schools

- Celebrate good news

All leading to raised achievement and attainment, and effective management of the school and MAT resources.

2   Ensure the correct data is being captured

Data can provide the MAT with the information to support school improvement and staff development. Just knowing in an instant how many pupils against the pupil admission numbers (PAN) are at each school, can support planning. Other areas such as attendance can be early indicators that interventions need to be applied. Pupil attainment is obviously a key indicator but by adding in areas such as staff or pupil absence, curriculum plan and behaviour, soon data starts to build the picture to support improvement.

Leaders should ask themselves:

- What does our data currently tell us about our schools?

- How do we compare with similar schools and MATs?

- Do we know why we are in this position?

- Are we happy to be where we are?

  - If yes, why?

  - If no, where would we like to be?

- How are we going to implement the identified improvements

3   Identify and monitor any interventions

Once school leaders understand what the data is telling them, they may want to apply interventions to support continued improvement. These interventions could be an additional maths group to support an academy where the performance needs to be improved or the sharing

of good practise across the Trust to improve the performance throughout the Trust's schools. It is imperative that whatever solution school leaders use for business intelligence, monitoring can be undertaken of the interventions to allow evaluation of their success.

4 Add comparative data sources

School leaders need to think about how additional data sources, not found on existing databases, can be added to analytics. These could include areas such as the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) and other National datasets. These help to understand whether a MAT or school is in line with what's happening elsewhere, and identify high-performing schools with a similar intake to identify opportunities for collaboration.

5 Set up a strategic data group

To implement the data strategy, a role with the correct level of responsibility and seniority should be in place to ensure the strategic aims of the organisation are met. This role will work closely with data managers across the trust to ensure the strategic requirements flow through to the day -to-day data activities at each school.

An ideal data strategy should include the strategic governance to ensure the effective implementation and reporting of progress on data use across the Trust. The group should meet to ensure key decisions impacting the use of data are made to meet the trust or school's requirements.

The remit of the group should cover all decisions impacting on data, including procurement of solutions, data storage, data polices, data analysis and presentation of data to all key stakeholders to ensure they have the relevant and up to date information for informed decision making.

6 Invest in suitable data analytics

Education leaders won't be able to ask the relevant questions if they can't see comparable data across all their schools. Many trusts share reports and spreadsheets in different silos. This can make it very hard to compare and contrast data. A single matrix is preferable. This triangulates the data to understand the impact of one benchmark on another. E.g. staff absence - does it have an impact on performance of a Year 11 pupil? Lesson cost - how much do they cost from one academy to another and is this cost effective?

OFSTED inspections state that MATs need to be able to identify weaknesses, provide effective support to sustain improvement and to ensure measures to spot underperformance. Without an effective data analytics tool, Education leaders will find it it difficult to determine the success of their data strategy.

If you would like to hear more about Questa, our data analytics tool developed specially for MATs and schools, please visit our website www.novatia.com/home-questa. Alternatively, if you would like help with your data strategy or any other Education ICT issue please email us on info@novatia.com or 01962 832632.