Orchard Multi-Academy Trust

Academies Escalation Policy

Reviewed: Autumn 2026

Mr Alex Davies

The path to great - *The English education system has many areas it must improve, but it has many strengths too. These strengths have led to a transformation in the quality of education for many children, particularly in those areas where school standards had been low for generations. The notion of the 'failing school' is not yet eradicated but it is much reduced. The available evidence concurs the best explanation for this is the growth of school trusts.*

But the benefits of school trusts have not been reserved only for the most challenging schools. Evidence shows that those within trusts – those who have experienced the benefits of collaboration and strong governance – recognise the added value of being in the group.

At the heart of this success is the two-fold system design of marrying institutional autonomy with appropriate accountability. This is the recipe for success that Sir Michael Barber pointed the system towards almost two decades ago, and following this recipe has led to important improvements that we must retain. The challenge ahead is to move the school system from good to great. Achieving this will require us to continue on and not drift off the path set out by Barber. We should walk it with purpose and confidence.

CST – From Great to Good, January 2025

If a school feels it is not receiving adequate support from Orchard Multi-Academy Trust (MAT), it can hold Orchard accountable by raising concerns through formal channels. The Advocate board would be the first stage, who would subsequently engage with the MAT board of Directors. At Orchard, we would envisage that any complaints would be dealt with at this stage and individual schools would see immediate changes to school support and any further escalation would not be required.

However, if the school believed there was still a lack of support (whether being for pupil outcomes or improved school operations) schools can seek an external review from the Department for Education (DfE).

Orchard encourages schools to actively monitor and document the lack of support provided; effectively using data and evidence to demonstrate the impact of insufficient support on student outcomes and school operations. This is either at the first stage, when the Board of Advocates engage with the Board of Directors, or if the school escalates to the DfE. Clear documentation will allow clarity when dealing with the complaint and allow the Trust to deal with any complaints in a succinct and timely manner.

Orchard Mutli-Academy Trust operates on a collaborative approach from all of its academies and encourages open dialogue at all levels.

Formal communication:

- **Advocate Boards (also known as Local Governing Boards):** Regularly raise concerns about support needs at Advocate meetings, documenting discussions and decisions made. This information is to be fed back to the board via the Clerk/Governance Professional, highlighting any key areas for improvement needed.

- **Orchard Board of Directors:** Directly contact Orchard with detailed concerns and requests for additional support. Orchard holds termly meetings between the Directors and the Advocates Boards. Much of the time this will be facilitated by the CEO of the Trust, with representation of the board present. Not only is this an opportunity to discuss much of what the Trust is achieving, it is an open forum to discuss any common themes across the Trust.

Data-driven evidence:

- **Performance data:** Analyse school performance data to highlight areas where lack of support is impacting student outcomes. Although this will be a key area of discussion for the board on an annual basis, each school may feel that support maybe required before the outcome of such data.
- **Needs analysis:** Present evidence of specific needs within the school, such as staff training gaps or resource deficiencies. This information will directly impact Orchard's CPD offer. Although much of the training is set annually, the Trust is reactive and will adjust training needs on a termly basis if the evidence suggests.

Internal review processes:

- **MAT complaints procedure:** Utilise the MAT's established complaints process to formally raise issues regarding lack of support. The Complaints procedure will be followed with the same due diligence as if it were a parent or guardian complaining.
- **Internal audits:** Request an internal review by the MAT to assess the level of support provided to the school.

External engagement:

- **External audit:** If the school/Board of Advocates felt an internal review was not deemed appropriate or impartial, and external review could take place. This would be in agreement between the Trust Board and the Advocate Board.
- **DfE contact:** If concerns continue to not be addressed, contact the Department for Education to report inadequate support from the MAT.

In conclusion:
When holding the Orchard Multi-Academy Trust to account, it's essential for all academies to adopt a collaborative approach; working together to identify solutions and drive improvement. Maintaining clear documentation is crucial; this includes keeping detailed records of all communications, requests for support, and responses from the MAT to ensure transparency and accountability.

By fostering collaboration, documenting interactions, and understanding the Scheme of Delegated Authority, Orchard academies can effectively navigate challenges and work towards meaningful improvements. Together, we can create an environment where every member of the school community continues to flourish.