

Creating new from old: exploring the lived experiences of
leaders implementing change within sponsored academies in
England.

By

Caroline Entwistle

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Abstract

This study offers an original contribution to knowledge in leadership and structured professional collaboration. It adds to existing understandings of leadership within multi-academy trusts (MAT), particularly the experiences of secondary leaders within and across sponsored academies.

The thesis investigated the roles and responsibilities of leaders associated with four sponsored academies, part of a single MAT. The role of a school leader is complex. Their voices are often not heard in turnaround contexts (Leithwood, Harris, and Strauss, 2010; House of Commons, 2017a). There is also complexity around leadership roles within schools and at MAT level, as both roles increasingly require collaboration between contexts. Thus, there is value in better understanding them. By extension, little is known about daily practice or how the MAT influenced their schools (Hill *et al.*, 2012; Salokangas and Chapman, 2014; Andrews *et al.*, 2017; Hutchings and Francis, 2017; Papanastasiou, 2017; Greany, 2018; OFSTED, 2019). Therefore, this study included exploration of the role of those deployed from the MAT to support leaders working in sponsored academies.

The research is presented as a case study of the leadership in a MAT in England, from an insider perspective. The MAT is a system leader (Macdonald, Burke and Stewart, 2018) working within its own context and across geographical boundaries, to enact wider improvement. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather the accounts of school leaders and members of the MAT with parallel and overlapping roles. Documents that exemplified MAT leaders' stories were also used to collate rich data, reflecting the complexities of leadership in a sponsored academy context.

The review of findings teased out the complexities of the school and MAT leaders' roles within the sponsored academy setting. It became clear that there were marked differences in how leaders interacted and their perspectives of priorities in the sponsored academy context, despite ostensibly similar roles. The case study considered the differences in how leaders' roles were enacted, and the reasons why. Detailed analysis identified a notable difference in the representation of the role of the MAT leader between the accounts of MAT leadership in school documents, and those of the leaders themselves. School leaders valued the contribution of the MAT leader, yet this role was less visibly represented in documents. In summary, the research contributed knowledge of educational leadership with a particular focus on structured professional collaboration in the MAT environment.

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Creating new from old: exploring the lived experiences of leaders implementing change within sponsored academies in England.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the study

The research explored secondary school leaders' experiences of leading change in a new research domain: the sponsored academy in the multi-academy trust (MAT). Gorard (2014) found that schools converting to a sponsored academy represented change through names, curriculum, governance with teacher practice becoming the focus for improvement. Early accounts focused on the more visible signs of change. However, a more subtle ongoing process has been the development of leadership roles as organisations have changed and grown.

The thesis provided an insider perspective considering the roles of school and MAT leaders engaged in structured professional collaboration. The data was collected from a single case study of the most recent evolution of the leadership of the challenging school in England: the sponsored academy. To put this into context, Woods and Woods (2009, p.94) stated: 'the power of the sponsor and Academies' independence from the local authority mean that they remain unique among English secondary schools.' Since inception in 2002 (Academies Commission, 2013;

Gibson, 2018; National Audit Office, 2010), educational policy surrounding academies has 'rolled on' (Wrigley in Gunter, 2012, p.140), despite successive changes in government.

The research aimed to make an original contribution towards existing understandings of school leadership and improvement in sponsored academy settings through developing a detailed understanding of how school and MAT leaders worked individually and collaboratively in the pursuit of school improvement. There was no intention to critique the MAT movement, or the measures by which schools were deemed to be failing. Neither did the research explore why sponsored academy chains expanded, or what makes them successful. These factors form the backdrop of a focused enquiry of leadership and how it is interpreted in the MAT context.

Whilst the outcomes of such a small study were limited in generalisability, they may be relatable to other contexts or be of interest to school leaders in similar contexts. By collecting rich data, reflecting the complexities of leadership in MATs, findings could contribute towards an increased understanding of the approaches being taken by school leaders.

1.2 The Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) Policy Context

The original MAT model in England was launched by the Labour government in 2002. Associated with autonomy in schooling (Education Act, 2002), MAT policy was intended to be limited to a small number of schools. Sponsored academies were publicly funded schools with private sponsors, intended to encourage innovation where existing school improvement methods had failed. School legal status changed to become part of an independent charity company upon conversion. This policy has not only survived but increased in prominence. The Department for Education (2016) stated that the remaining schools, maintained by local authorities, should become academies by the end of 2020.

A sponsor is an organisation that the Department for Education approved to support an academy or group of academies. As per the definition of NCTL, (2014, section 4, para. 5): A 'multi-academy trust is where a group of schools is governed through a single set of members and directors.' Whilst most sponsors are MATs, NAO (2018, p.1) outlined that 'individual philanthropists, private companies, charities or other educational institutions may also set up academy trusts and sponsor academy schools.' MATs are varied in size and comprise a diverse range of types of school. The thesis explored the experiences of leaders implementing change in four sponsored academies, all in one MAT.

1.3 The MAT

The MAT operated globally, nationally, and regionally. It was associated with corporate philanthropy. The trust was established under the Mark I phase (2002-2006) of government policy (Academies Commission, 2013; Courtney, 2015) and has evolved into one of the largest MATs in England. Ehron and Godfrey (2017) and Hutchings and Francis (2017) showed that by 2017, the MAT was 1 of 10 MATs (1% of all MATs) in England that comprised 30 or more schools. As such, examining the ways several leaders in the MAT collaborated, from an insider point of view was interesting.

Moreover, the MAT employed leaders whose roles were concerned with leading change. Two key roles central to this research were the role of the secondary school leader and the role of leaders from the MAT who worked alongside leaders. The ways in which their roles overlapped and collaborated suggested new opportunities for exploring the leadership of school improvement. While the MAT comprised of a range of school types, the study focused on the experiences of leaders implementing change in the sponsored academy context.

1.4 Rationale for the study

The notion of a MAT remained relatively new in educational terms. Eyles, Machin, Silbva, (2017, p.35) stated that academies represented: 'The most salient change in

terms of school structures' since the year 2000. Alongside the relative infancy of MATs, Berkovich (2018) noted that there was no consistent definition of a struggling school and no single model for school improvement. Existing research focused on schools that: 'require a lift in performance rather than radical intervention' (Leithwood, Harris, Strauss, 2010, p.13). So, the research was intended to contribute towards existing knowledge on school leadership through representing leaders' stories of change in the relatively new research domain of the sponsored academy context.

1.5 Research Questions

The research explored the leadership experiences of leaders in schools which were deemed to be struggling. The approaches taken by leaders in bringing about improvement, and their work within the context of the MAT, were explored. To investigate the aims of the research the following research questions were formulated:

1. How did the leaders in the sponsored academies perceive and enact their roles in school improvement?

This question explored how school leaders perceived and carried out their role in their contexts. This considered the extent to which, as Gjerde and Ladegard, (2019, p.46) investigated, leaders perceived that their roles were fixed or in a 'constant state

of becoming’.

2. How did the leaders from the MAT perceive and enact their roles in school improvement in sponsored academies?

This question investigated the role of the MAT leader. That is, those leaders deployed by the MAT to work alongside leaders in schools to support them in their daily practice. Studies (Leithwood, Harris, and Strauss, 2010; House of Commons, 2017a) indicated that the accounts of school leaders working in challenging contexts are not frequently recorded. Given that the MAT is a relatively new phenomenon, this question explored a new role in school leadership.

3. How did the roles of the school leader and the leader(s) from the MAT interact in relation to school improvement in the MAT?

Literature showed that little was known about leadership practices or how the MAT influenced school leaders (Hill *et al.*, 2012; Salokangas and Chapman, 2014; Andrews *et al.*, 2017; Hutchings and Francis, 2017; Papanastasiou, 2017; Greany, 2018; OFSTED, 2019). This research question therefore considered the ways in which the school and MAT leader collaborated and developed relationships.

4. What can be learned about the leadership of school improvement from the common and varying experiences of leaders across the MAT in this context?

Literature (Chapman, 2013, p.358; Chapman and Mujis, 2013, p.353; Chapman, 2015) suggested that there was a ‘paucity’ of research exploring how such complex

collaboration led to school improvement. There were also conflicting views concerning the importance of articulating daily practice. Understanding the communities that leaders participated in, lent itself to exploring collaboration in practice.

1.6 Key Literature

To gain a deeper understanding of the research context, a literature review was undertaken. This was organised into three main chapters:

- School leadership style, role and focus
- The struggling school context
- Multi Academy Trusts.

A brief overview of key ideas from the literature review were as follows:

Establishing the place of school leadership was an early consideration. Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009) found that school leadership mattered. This reflected literature (Gronn, 2000; Leithwood *et al.*, 2008; Fink, 2009; Robinson, 2011; Academies Commission, 2013) more widely, which showed that leadership was only secondary in importance to good teaching. Whilst a range of leadership styles leadership existed, research (Gronn, 2010; Robinson, 2011; Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2019) suggested leaders adopted a range of styles in practice. This

suggested that the research could contribute towards better understanding how improvement was led.

As such, consideration of leadership roles in schools across the relatively new context of the MAT was a focus. Biddle (1979; 1986) and Sias and Duncan (2019) suggested roles were important because they enabled identity. Research questions to explore whether professionals occupying similar roles, across different contexts but in the same MAT, focused on the similar priorities or whether these varied, became important. The research design included both MAT and school leader roles.

Additionally, what leaders focused on has changed. Research (Chapman, 2019; OECD, 2019) stated that previously government (DoE, 1998) interest centred on curriculum with financial management delegated to schools. More recently, effective leadership was more concerned with improving teacher practice through collaboration. Framing interview questions to explore what leaders focused on and what collaboration looked like could add to existing understandings in this area.

Pertinent to the study of leadership in the sponsored academy was literature which considered the struggling school context. Clegg *et al.* (2017) identified that students had limited access to strong teachers because of wider difficulties in recruitment and retention in disadvantaged areas. Ball (2003) on the other hand, noted that leaders struggled to identify what to focus on first, leading to the final research

question, to consider what could be learned about how the MAT supported leaders in sponsored academies.

Consequently, leadership of the MAT was placed within a wider context of collaboration theory, Bauman (2008) noted that close-knit communities characterised by long-established, shared histories were gradually exchanged for more temporary relationships. Moreover, Chapman (2015) noted that school and MAT leaders had limited access to evidence to support them in their daily roles. Structuring the research questions and design to engage with a range of leaders' daily practices in the same organisation was therefore, potentially unusual.

1.7 Research Design

The research questions lent themselves to studying the perceptions of individuals leading in a fluid, socially constructed environment. The ways in which leaders experienced their situations depended on their own impressions of their schools. Through being interested in people's experiences in their contexts, the research applied conceptual tools associated with an interpretivist paradigm. Aligned to a philosophical position which embraced subjectivity, a case study (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Yin, 2003; Thomas, 2013; Thomas, 2015; Candappa 2017) was used to explore the MAT from different angles. In this case, four sponsored academies as part of a MAT, in England.

Semi-structured interviews were the primary method of data collection used to gather the perspectives of leaders across the academies in the MAT. In addition, documentary analysis provided a wider range of data to broaden the perspectives of those within the MAT. Candappa (2017) suggested that by using a variety of documents, a greater depth of understanding to the case might emerge.

Theoretical sampling, through constant comparison, allowed continual movement, back and forth, between the data and the analysis phases. Gilgun (2014, pp.227) considered these as 'adaptable and open-ended' principles for analysing data, whilst Charmaz (2014) stated that participants' data could be used to theorise about what their lives as leaders were like. In theorising from the data, Kelle (2014, p.11) showed how middle-range concepts could be transferred to new research domains. In this context, the sponsored academy situated in the MAT environment.

1.8 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations in working with participants and documents included my position as an insider and a senior leader within the MAT. Participants were reassured both in writing and in person that their contributions would be represented anonymously. To further preserve the anonymity of the MAT and those interviewed, pseudonyms were used.

Additional ethical considerations surfaced concerning the use of documents. The analysis of documents enabled, as McCulloch (2017) described a broadening of the range of perspectives, through published and readily accessible sources. However, those featured in the documents, or their authors, would be unaware that they were also an anonymous School Leader in this research. There is a further exploration of the ethical issues involved in the research in Chapter 3.

1.9 Thesis Structure

The thesis has been organised into chapters to tell the stories of leaders interviewed and explored through documentary data. In Chapter 2, the MAT that is the focus of the study, is introduced. In Chapters 3, 4 and 5, literature examined leadership role, style, and focus; the struggling school context; and MATs in practice, respectively. Following this, in Chapters 6 and 7, the research design is discussed. The philosophical and practical influences in relation to data collection and analysis, together with a consideration of ethical issues and my positionality as an insider is also considered.

Chapters 8 contains analysis and discussion of data organised in line with five embedded units of analysis (Yin, 2003) or nests (Thomas, 2016). Key ideas are then documented at the end of each section in this chapter, in relation to the research questions to reflect a constant comparative approach (Thomas, 2016). Following

this, Chapter 9 comprises discussion of findings from across both interview phases and documents. Key findings from these chapters are then related to the research questions in Chapter 10. Finally, in Chapter 11, leaders' perception of their roles and how they interacted is presented, followed by the implications of the research in practice, with recommendations for further research draw the thesis to a conclusion.

CHAPTER 2: THE MULTI ACADEMY TRUST

2.1 Introduction

The MAT is one of the largest in England, with philanthropic interests and influence on a global scale. The thesis emerged through my own role as a school leader in a sponsored academy within the MAT. The investigation focussed on the lived experiences of leaders within four sponsored academies that were part of the MAT. This included leaders whose roles focused on leading large subject teams, Assistant Principals, Vice Principals, Principals, and those in a comparable role in the MAT who had directly supported each school. The leaders participated in semi-structured interviews, and documentary analysis was undertaken.

2.2 The MAT

Government MAT policy was launched in September 2002 (Academies Commission, 2013; Gibson, 2018; National Audit Office, 2010). The MAT started under the Mark I phase of the same policy (2002-2006) (Academies Commission, 2013; Junemann and Ball, 2013; Courtney, 2015) and has developed philanthropic interests and influence on a worldwide scale (Olmedo, 2017). By 2017, Ehron and Godfrey (2017)

and Hutchings and Francis (2017) showed, the MAT was 1 of 10 MATs (1% of all MATs) that comprised 30 or more schools. It could be identified as a system leader. Representing multiple points of view from within the same MAT could therefore make an original contribution to existing research.

Literature (Academies Commission, 2013; Gunter and McGinty, 2014; Keddie, 2015; Cook and McKeeman, 2018) suggested that the MAT reflected the idea that the range and type of schools that children attended has changed significantly. As a result, it became increasingly difficult to record a complete range of educational providers in England (Courtney, 2015). This diversity extended to individual schools as they held multiple identities represented under curriculum provision, selection of pupils and legal status. The MAT in the research reflected, in part, the diversity of types of school in England. Lenon (2017) noted that the composition of schools in a MAT included schools that have maintained their original faith identity as sponsored academies, free schools, all through schools, primary and secondary sponsored academies. In contrast, the government's website for education (Gov.uk) implied a misleading simplicity concerning schools in England. These included: state schools, which could be community schools, grammar schools; faith schools; free schools; academies; city technology colleges; private schools.

According to Bhattacharya (2013) and Bragg (2014) government academy policy was presented to communities as increased choice for parents. However, Garner

(2011) and Courtney (2015) noted that different types of school with very different and often multiple identities offered different viewpoints of the same local or national landscape. Gunter and McGinty (2014) and Reay (2017) criticised such variety as encouraging a fragmented approach. In addition, such variety could be said to be reminiscent of the disorganised state of education in England prior to the 1870 Education Act (Ball, 2013; Olmedo, 2017). The table represented school types in July 2017 for schools in England (all ages) and suggested that academies have become an integral part of schooling:

Table 1: School Types in England (2017)

Establishment Type	Establishment Group	Number	%	Number of Schools	% of Schools
Academy 16-19 Converter	Academies	7	0	6493	27
Academy 16-19 Sponsor Led		1	0		
Academy Alternative Provision Converter		45	0		
Academy Alternative Provision Sponsor Led		21	0		
Academy Converter		4377	18		
Academy Special Converter		186	1		
Academy Special Sponsor Led		44	0		
Academy Sponsor Led		1812	7		
Voluntary Aided School	LA maintained schools	3227	13	14993	62
Voluntary Controlled School		2023	8		
Pupil Referral Unit		247	1		
LA Nursery School		401	2		
Community School		7526	31		
Community Special School		637	3		
Foundation School		847	3		
Foundation Special School		85	0		
Free Schools	Free Schools	269	1	430	2
Free Schools - 16-19		18	0		
Free Schools - Alternative Provision		37	0		
Free Schools Special		23	0		
Studio Schools		35	0		
University Technical College		48	0		
City Technology College	Independent schools	3	0	2386	9
Non-Maintained Special School		62	0		

Other Independent School		1857	8		
Other Independent Special School		464	2		
		24302	100	24302	100

Data derived from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-in-england>

This table also illustrated a range of schools. Between 2002 and 2017 academies grew to 27% of schools in England (DfE, 2017a). Research (Academies Commission, 2013; DfE, 2018a, DfE, 2018b) found that this expanded the range of academy types within this single category. However, there were limitations to this data. The table only represented schools' legal status and does not highlight the difference in the number of primary schools, which are more numerous and less likely to be academies than secondary schools. It also did not show how the diverse educational landscape described by Courtney (2015) had changed over time. Hutchings and Francis (2018) demonstrated that by 2018, there were over 7500 academies in England.

Another aspect of the MAT's identity was rooted in corporate philanthropy (Robertson, 2012; Olmedo, 2017). Governments sought to reduce social disadvantage through establishing networks with corporate partners. Literature (Ball, 2013; Junemann and Ball, 2013; Papanastasiou, 2017) criticised this approach as delegating responsibility for the delivery of educational provision. Junemann and Ball (2013) identified that through their investments in education, philanthropists

were perceived to want to influence national and global policy. This led to wider criticism (Ball, 2009; Junemann and Ball, 2013a; Ball, 2013b) of a muddling of the lines between the state, the public, the private and governments.

Furthermore, whilst the intention of such philanthropists was to reduce social disadvantage, in practice, diversity did not necessarily guarantee that more students from disadvantaged backgrounds would secure better outcomes (Ball, 2013b; Keep and Mayhew, 2014). These intentions were reflected in the mission and make-up of the MAT. Studies (Ball, 2013a; Author 1, 2013; DFE, 2014) written about the MAT suggested that seeking to reduce educational inequality through the application of business methods associated with corporate philanthropy was evident in the trust's name and mission. In practice, Hutchings and Francis (2017; 2018) found that when compared to 48 other MATs, the overall student population reflected high levels of social disadvantage together with a dominant number of sponsored academies that made up the trust.

An additional characteristic of educational corporate philanthropy was an interest in teacher improvement. The MAT reflected Robertson (2012) in that teacher improvement had become a marketable commodity on a global scale. Robertson (2012) and Ball (2013) also identified that the increased visibility of teachers engaged the interest of global players such as the World Bank, McKinsey and Company, Pearson Education, and the OECD. Robertson (2012, p.3) stated that teachers were

then portrayed as 'both villains and heroes in the new unfolding educational policy drama'. For those teachers whose work had been traditionally organised nationally or locally, this represented change. Davies (2018) pointed out that such approaches carried an assumption that all teachers want to improve. More widely, questions arose concerning who makes decisions about how social problems are solved, who decides what teachers will learn and what classroom practices they will adopt (Ball, 2003; Gunter in Gunter, 2012).

Olmedo (2017) stated that these questions concerning scale of influence were reflected in the work of the MAT. Literature (Author 1, 2013; DFE, 2014; name of MATonline/about us) written by or about the MAT showed that they identified strongly with the notion of investment in teacher improvement, large-scale investments in curriculum development and initial teacher training. More widely, research (Author 1, 2013; Junemann and Ball, 2013; DFE, 2014) indicated that some methods adopted by the MAT were influenced by global teaching practices from high performing Charter schools in the United States to effect system change.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP STYLE, ROLES AND FOCUS

3.1 School Leadership Style

Literature concerning school leadership styles, role and what school leaders focused on, is explored in Chapter 3. Although sponsored academies have attracted much attention, Greany (2018) stated that much of what was known about improving the quality of teaching and learning and school leadership resided in what was written about the leadership of individual schools. Leadership has been defined as an indirect (Harris, 2004) social process of influence (Bush and Glover, 2003; Bush, 2008) where a clearly expressed vision and values could lead to change and in particular, the development of people. In his research, Gronn (2000; 2010; 2015) suggested that historically, leadership was not hierarchical; success was perceived to be more likely if a community worked together. This was relevant when considering the research questions. Exploring roles, styles and what leaders focused on in the leadership of change could add to existing understandings of school improvement in the MAT context. This chapter will therefore open with a consideration of selected styles of leadership.

3.1.1 Instructional Leadership

In 1980s North America, Instructional Leadership was a response to research which claimed that schools could have very little effect on student achievement. Three studies (CUREE, 2009; Bush and Glover, 2014; Parlar and Cansoy, 2017) revealed a positive correlation between leaders focused on improving teacher led practice and student achievement. Research indicated that instructional leadership enabled a principal to be close to the daily practice of the school, rather than being concerned with administrative tasks (Bush and Glover, 2008; Creemers and Kyriakides, 2008; CUREE, 2009; OECD, 2014). This indicated a development of the role of the school leader. Instructional leadership therefore might be of interest to a MAT, seeking to improve schools under academy policy as Branch *et al.* (2013) suggested that it had a positive effect on improving student outcomes which represented a change in approach.

This style of leadership has though, faced challenge. Instructional Leadership often remained operationally undefined and its dependence on individuals limited its sustainability (Bush, 2008; Hvidston *et al.*, 2015; Bush and Glover, 2016). In a secondary school context, it was 'virtually impossible' (Danielson, 2006, p.22) for the leader to know all subjects and associated pedagogies to purposefully help their teachers develop their classroom practice. Furthermore, OECD (2014) noted that leaders struggled to balance training teachers alongside operational responsibilities. Moreover, Bush and Glover (2008) and Markholt, Michelson and Fink (2018) noted

that leaders were further challenged by struggling to accurately identify specific actions teachers should take to improve their practice in the classroom. The ways in which leaders adopted instructional practices was of interest to this study. Exploring whether leaders experienced the challenges identified and how they overcame them in the sponsored academy context could contribute towards answering the questions of sustainability presented in literature.

3.1.2 Transformational Leadership

Although Instructional Leadership provided a focus on teacher practice, literature (Yukl, 1999; Waldman, Galvin, Galumba, 2012) also showed that school leaders might adopt a transformational approach in effecting change. Yukl (1999) stated that transformational leaders challenged teachers' beliefs on a deeper, less tangible level, appealing to emotions. Transformational leadership emerged in the 1990s (Bush and Glover, 2008) and engaged individuals on a cultural and philosophical level rather than through structural, operational change. It was relevant to the school improvement narrative because the purpose was to enable followers to trust their leaders to motivate them to go above and beyond (Waldman, Galvin and Walumbwa, 2012). The MAT context provided a new setting to consider this view.

More widely studies (Yukl, 1999; Bass and Riggio, 2008; Jackson and Parry, 2011) agreed that leaders needed to engage teachers in acting for the benefit of the

organisation, rather than themselves. To do this, leaders needed to develop a compelling, unifying vision between leader and followers (Leithwood *et al.*, 1999; Yukl, 1999). This was seen to encourage teachers to look outside of their own interests. Research (Leithwood *et al.*, 1999; Harris, 2005; Bass and Riggio, 2008) suggested that this approach was intended to enable creativity, collaboration and growth through relationships and professional development. Similarly to instructional leadership, transformational leadership sought to focus on organisational practices to increase student outcomes (Harris, 2005). It has dominated the educational landscape in recent years (Berkovich, 2018).

A transformational style does though, have limitations. Timperley *et al.* (2007) identified that because it depended on a charismatic approach, over time, it was perceived to be less sustainable particularly for large organisations (Bollen in Reynolds *et al.*, 1996). Moreover, Berkovich (2018) stated that it was more dependent upon individuals and therefore, less effective in schools in challenging circumstances. This was because they might require systems to be embedded through a 'hands on style' rather than individual personality. This raised questions which could be explored further concerning leaders' experiences in their environments. This was of particular interest because Jackson and Parry (2011) indicated that transformational leaders tended to focus on senior leaders, yet transformational leadership was originally intended to engage individuals at all levels (Bass and Riggio, 2008).

3.1.3 Distributed Leadership

In comparison to instructional and transformational leadership, distributed leadership presented a more collegial approach (Bennett *et al.*, 2003; Bush, 2008; Bush and Glover, 2008; 2014). Literature (Gronn, 2000, Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd, 2009; West-Burnham, 2018) showed collaboration through relationships, rather than positional authority evolved. This was less focused on individuals and more concerned with group contributions in situ (Day, Harris and Hadfield, 2001; Spillane *et al.*, 2001; Bush, 2008; Hallinger and Heck, 2010). This, in turn, increased potential for sustainability (Spillane *et al.*, 2001; Mujis *et al.*, 2004; Diamond and Spillane, 2016) as decision-making extended beyond the Principal to include teachers and leaders closest to the classroom (Bollen in Reynolds *et al.*, 1996; OECD, 2014).

Distributed leadership also extended capacity and decision-making (Hallinger and Heck, 2010) and encouraged the identification of expertise within (Harris, 2004; Whelan, 2009). Harris and Chapman also (2002) noted that this required the sharing of power rather than tasks across a range of formal and informal leaders (Spillane *et al.*, 2001; Bennett *et al.*, 2003; Harris, 2004). It relied on open, transparent communication, a focus on a smaller range of key areas for improvement and collective practice across multiple leaders rather than individuals (Bennett *et al.*, 2003).

Although research existed concerning the practices of the Principal, literature (Spillane *et al.*, 2001; Harris and Mujis; 2003; Harris, 2005) stated less was known

about middle and senior leadership teams in practice and more recently, how leadership was distributed in the MAT context (Salokangas and Ainscow, 2018). Bush (2008) also stated that more time may be needed to secure collective agreement among leaders. Therefore, interviews which explored the experiences of a range of leaders across sponsored academies and at varying levels of seniority in a single MAT, could contribute towards this gap.

3.1.4 Teacher Leadership

Another way to develop leadership capacity existed through Teacher Leadership. Danielson (2006) explained how teachers worked collaboratively from within their own classrooms to take responsibility for leading change. To examine impact, Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009) synthesised 134 studies, of which 27 quantified a relationship with student outcomes and identified teacher leadership could have a positive impact on teacher self-efficacy and create a sense of collective responsibility and accountability. Levin and Schrum (2016) noted that more widely, teacher leadership drew on skills associated with distributed and transformational styles through teachers forming professional learning communities. Moreover, Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) noted such communities could be more sustainable. Leithwood, Harris and Strauss (2010) used interviews and surveys with senior leaders and teachers experienced in school turnaround to identify that high performing schools invested in building teacher capacity once early priorities to

stem decline have been achieved. Examining leaders' experiences of such communities in the sponsored academy setting could contribute to this knowledge.

Secondly, schools characterised by teacher leadership were associated with more experimental methods. Mujis *et al.* (2004) indicated that teachers were supported in becoming reflective and engaged in continuous improvement rather than reacting to changes in government policy. Mujis *et al.* (2004) also showed that teachers, unlike the instructional leader, were not operating in isolation. Danielson (2006, p.13) described how they were influenced through their sense of belonging by seeking to 'inspire others to join them on a journey without a specific destination'.

Creating effective learning opportunities for teachers which impacted on student learning was though, found to be complex. Research noted that teachers needed time to be able to work together (Day, Harris and Hadfield, 2001; Hargreaves, 2014; Markholt, Michelson and Fink, 2018). Furthermore, literature (Day *et al.*, 2000; Danielson, 2006; Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd, 2009) identified that a school culture which supported teacher learning mattered, along with strong instructional leadership from a Principal willing to delegate responsibility. As such, schools required different approaches, depending on their position, context, and experience (Bollen in Reynolds *et al.*, 1996; Hopkins, 2013).

3.1.5 Leadership Practices

More recently, literature (Day, Harris and Hadfield, 2001; Gronn, 2010; Robinson, 2011; Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2019) identified a growing interest in integrated leadership practice, as individual styles were perceived to be “partial” (Bush and Glover, 2014, p.31). Hopkins (2013) and Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins (2019) found that school leaders often drew on a range of practices in response to the context of the school whilst Bush (2008) noted a lack of clarity concerning the effect of individual styles on student outcomes. Bush and Glover (2014) argued in favour of a fusion of leadership styles, towards one of ‘distributed instructional leadership’ focused on teaching, but also engaged in the work of school improvement. More widely, studies showed that school leadership was complex and as such, hierarchical ‘one size fits all’ approaches were less valued when compared to contextually driven practices (Stoll *et al.*, in Reynolds *et al.*, 1996; Hopkins and Lagerweij in Reynolds *et al.*, 1996; Day *et al.*, 2000; Day, Harris and Hadfield, 2001; Hopkins; 2013; Chapman, 2019).

Furthermore, distinct styles of leadership indicated different ways of understanding and interpreting events in schooling (Bush, 2008). Considering this, researchers found less focus on the actions of individuals, particularly the variable influence of the charismatic leader (Bass and Riggio, 2008; Robinson, 2011; Diamond and Spillane, 2016; Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2019). Diamond and Spillane (2016) suggested that when the leadership activity, rather than individuals was prioritised,

more people were able to participate. This included those who did not have formal leadership roles offering a more democratic approach (Bush and Glover, 2003). This was pertinent to the study as it was concerned with the ways in which school leaders, and the wider MAT worked together and as Hopkins (2013) stated, the extent to which successful practices could be transferred from one school to another.

3.1.6 System Leadership

Whilst studies of leadership practices provided a broader platform for developing the practice of professionals in the school building, system leadership represented through the academies programme, evolved. The Academies Commission (2013) and Hargreaves (2014) found this indicated a change in approach from central government leadership for improvement, to one where responsibility for improvement was led by and for school leaders. System leaders influenced practice beyond their immediate school or context.

Studies found some clear benefits to system leadership in schooling. In earlier work, Hargreaves (2010) and Hargreaves (2014) interviewed school leaders and identified that system leadership was associated with increased autonomy, whilst Godfrey (2017) added in a schooling context, routes of entry to the profession diversified. Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009) suggested that at policy level, the metaphorical platform for leadership broadened. Furthermore, Mujs *et al.* (2004)

and Hargreaves (2014) identified that early models of support included groups of schools forming networks of peer support. Previously, Hargreaves (2010) recognised School Improvement Partners, via the Local Education Authority, had a role to play. Both Hopkins (2013) and Hargreaves (2014) noted that between school support could lead to improvement in practice, evidence of improvements in student outcomes or equity were more problematic.

As such, Hargreaves (2010) and Boylan (2016) noted that the language of the self-improving system was confusing. Hargreaves (2014, p.701) further identified that schools simply operated as 'small-scale, self-improving sub-systems, islands of collective partnerships.' Moreover, settings and roles associated with system leadership varied. In England, the DfE (2019c) identified system leader roles as comprising: 637 teaching school alliances; 790 teaching schools; 1,222 National Leaders of Education; 396 National Leaders of Governance. However, the data did not include 'Specialist Leaders of Education'; middle or senior leaders working in schools to support improvement or informal networks of professionals working to support each other.

Additionally, where leadership traditionally resided with the Principal, distributed in a single school, an executive level of leadership more typically associated with the business world emerged. As such, schools collaborating for professional development purposes became more common through system leadership. More

research though, was needed to understand what this looked like in practice (Bush and Glover; 2014; Hargreaves, 2014; Godfrey, 2017). Hopkins (2013) suggested that the blend of instructional and distributed leadership practices of system leadership should lead to improvement. However, studies (Higham, Hopkins and Matthews, 2009; Hargreaves, 2014; Godfrey, 2017) argued that evidence was limited concerning the extent to which such a system could realize its' original intentions of reducing social inequality. In practice, 'it's not the named role themselves, rather what leaders do through them that constitutes system leadership' (Higham, Hopkins and Matthews, 2009, p.12). Through telling the stories of leaders, this study might add to the current limited body of knowledge on system leadership in the MAT context. Table 2 provides a summary of key points discussed in this chapter so far.

Table 2: Summary of key ideas arising in School Leadership Style

Key ideas that inform the research design:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School leadership research has evolved to explore leadership practice. • Instructional Leadership requires school leaders to be close to the work of improving teacher practice though remains operationally undefined. • Leaders need to engage with teachers' beliefs, commonly associated with transformational leadership if they are to bring about change. • Relationships rather than positional authority are an important facet of leadership style. To do this, leaders need to be able to identify and develop expertise in others. • Teacher leadership is associated with enabling a greater sense of collective responsibility for improvement. • The varying range of styles of leadership supports the view that there is no single model for improving schools. • System Leadership has increased in popularity and is associated with enabling leaders to work across different schooling contexts.

3.2 School Leadership Roles

The expansion of the government academies programme since 2002 contributed to the emergence of the role of a System Leader in schools. Through school leaders and teachers collaborating across a broader range of contexts, Higham, Hopkins and Matthews, (2009) indicated that new challenges to the role of a school leader emerged. Role theory, such as the work of Berger and Luckmann (1966) explored these challenges in context of the individual self, how teachers identify with leadership, their relationships with each other and the institution within which the role of a teacher-leader sat.

Biddle (1979; 1986) and more recently, Sias and Duncan (2019) stated that roles enabled individual and collective identity with a set of rights, duties, expectations, and norms. Burke and Stets (2009) further noted that they provided meaning and structure in social situations. Turner (2006) identified that role theorists interested in a structural perspective explored the idea that the position or status associated with a given role already existed and that the individual stepping into the role adopted the behaviours and expectations associated with that role. This indicated some continuity over time.

From a structural perspective, Biddle (1986), Turner (2006), and Sias and Duncan (2019), all found that roles were a set of expectations and behaviours that related to predictable, observable practical activity. In this context, a teacher's role might have

included the activity of imparting knowledge, speaking to parents, or supervising a lunch queue of children. However, some elements of a role might not be dependably visible on every occasion and may evolve. Literature (Biddle, 1979; Day and Harrison, 2007; Sias and Duncan, 2019) also suggested that the component elements of a role could change. Moreover, Day and Harrison (2007) stated that as leaders grew in experience, their own sense of identity with their own leadership could enable them to broaden their engagement with others and approach leadership challenges through working collectively with others.

Alternatively, roles that were not necessarily fixed but instead, evolved, were associated with an interactionist perspective. This approach considered how people adopted roles through their interaction with others and how and why roles changed (Turner, 2006; Burke and Stets, 2009). In the context of teaching, Valli and Buese (2007) stated that there was little agreement concerning the extent to which teachers' roles have changed and more research was required to understand this particularly in the MAT context. Valli and Buese (2007) also identified that the amount of change experienced by teachers and leaders remained vastly understated and as such, teachers needed to adapt to: changing policy demands; changed community influences; diverse approaches to leadership; increased pressure through high stakes accountability. Studies (Day and Harrison, 2007; DeRue, Ashford and Cotton; 2009; DeRue and Ashford, 2010) found, that they were not necessarily dependent on a formal leadership role. Furthermore, both Biddle (1979) and Day

and Harrison (2007) identified that those in transitory roles were challenged to learn new skills whilst retaining those learned through previous roles. Exploring the ways in which leaders' roles changed and developed through interview could explore how clearly defined school leaders' roles were or whether, in the challenging context, they are in the 'constant state of becoming (Gjerde and Ladegard, 2019 p.46).

One consequence of a leader's role continually changing was a lack of clarity. Yet Day and Harrison (2007) perceived that clarity concerning a leader's identity was an important predictor of leader effectiveness. Gjerde and Ladegard (2019, p.46) further noted that ambiguity could result in a leader's role being unspecified and unclear, leaving them to suffer from 'an overwhelming demand'. One way to address this challenge might be to describe the elements of a leader's role. Biddle (1986) and Gjerde and Ladegard (2019) however, identified that conformity was not guaranteed even where such description existed. Literature (Burke and Stets, 2009; DeRue, Ashford and Cotton, 2009; Sias and Duncan, 2019) more widely supported this claim because individuals in the same role, in the same organization might enact their role differently.

Interactionist role theory also identified the presence of individual choice (Turner, 2006) even in structured working contexts, such as a school. Indeed, it would be reasonable to assume that given the institutional nature of a school, leaders operate highly structured roles. However, as Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins (2019) stated, a

leader could adopt a plethora of leadership styles, but it might also be the case that their role was open to interpretation and may evolve as part of the turnaround journey. This would also be interesting in the context of the study as individuals undertaking the same roles in the same organization will be interviewed.

In contrast to an interactionist perspective, Berger and Luckmann (1966, p.165) argued that roles became institutionalized and a 'common stock of knowledge' in terms of those rights, duties, expectations, and norms associated with a given role emerged. If these aspects as Biddle (1986) and Gjerde and Ladegard (2019) suggested, were not fixed, this could increase the challenge presented to school leaders. Although the school institution physically existed, it might need to rapidly establish a new set of norms and behaviours and a new identity. As part of this, existing roles might be changed in favour of developing a new identity for the school community, of which leaders are a part. Moreover, for roles to become institutionalized, time was needed for leaders to develop their own identity (DeRue, Ashford, and Cotton, 2009). If change was required at all levels of the organization in the context of the transition from a predecessor school to a newly sponsored academy, the limitation of time could risk the development of the leader identity. This in turn, may impact on the effectiveness of the leadership role.

Table 3 below summarises key points concerning how leaders' roles evolved or were already established which could purposefully be considered in the data collection

phase of this study. This was pertinent given that as OECD (2014) stated, the role of the school Principal was still not well understood and as Leithwood, Harris, and Strauss (2010) and the House of Commons (2017a) identified, the voices of school leaders working in turnaround contexts were not commonly heard. By extension, even less was known about how leaders developed relationships with others (Day and Harrison, 2007; DeRue and Ashford; 2010) with even less attention paid to teacher perspectives (MacBeath, Galton and Bangs, 2020).

Table 3: Summary of key ideas from School Leadership Roles

Key ideas that inform the research design:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roles enable individual and collective identity. They provide structure and meaning in social situations. • Different theorists argue that the elements of a role are established while others take the view that roles evolve. • Not all elements of a role are visible. • If roles are transitory there may be a lack of clarity. Yet even if clarity exists, compliance is not guaranteed. • The voices of school leaders in turnaround contexts are not commonly heard. • Less is known about how leaders develop relationships with others.

3.3 School Leadership Focus

A key element of school leaders’ roles focused on leading change in teacher practice. From a theoretical perspective, this sat within change theory which formally emerged as a form of critical theory. Weiss (1995) stated that theorising these approaches was intended to support those implementing change to be specific about what was guiding their work. Weiss *et al.* (1995) also identified that evaluating

the impact of change initiatives in communities was found to be particularly difficult to ascertain. As such, people's stories and experiences mattered in the research context as they provided insights into how change occurred. This was relevant because the study considered the stories of leaders enacting change. What could also be learned from Weiss *et al.* (1995) and Hopkins and Lagerweij in Reynolds *et al.*, 1996), was that when implementing complex change in schools, which academy sponsorship brings, clarity concerning purpose, action and intended outcome should be secured collectively and methodically. Considering this, focus mattered (Beer and Nohria, 2000; Fullan, 2001), yet opinion varied concerning how this should happen.

Another consideration when leading change was that in practice, change was not linear. Aspects were unpredictable with feedback not being planned into a project plan. It had, Fullan (2001, p.31) stated, an 'accompanying messiness' and sense of 'trial and error' (Hopkins and Lagerweij in Reynolds *et al.*, 1996). A theory of change might therefore only model what we believe will happen. Moreover, different opinions also existed as to whether change should be leadership led 'top-down' (Kotter, 2006), from the 'bottom up' (Beer, Eisenstat and Spector, 2006) or a blend of the two (Beer and Nohria, 2000). Furthermore, Fullan (2001) and Beer, Eisenstat and Spector (2006) both stated that although change could be planned for, led and managed, it would be challenging to control and required a culture of openness with employees (Beer and Nohria, 2000).

Moreover, the demands on what school leaders focused on has changed over time (Bollen in Reynolds *et al.*, 1996). The DoE (1988) Education Reform Act placed the leadership of curriculum and assessment under the control of the Secretary of State. From this, the National Curriculum emerged, subjects were organized into core and foundation categories (DoE, 1998) and key stages of a child's school career were set. The DoE (1998) delegated responsibility for financial management to school leaders. At the same time, the school leader's focus was to raise standards through improved examination results as Hansard (1997) stated, a government policy narrative of 'zero tolerance on underperformance'.

More recent research (OFSTED, 2017; Leckie and Goldstein, 2018) identified that through an over emphasis on high stakes accountability, school leaders adopted approaches that limited curriculum opportunities for students or indeed, narrowed pupil intake to secure the required improvement. Whilst the improvement of outcomes for students is a logical focus for school leaders, research (Leithwood and Jantzi, 1999; Menon, 2011; Bush, 2008; Bush and Glover, 2014) on senior leaders' impact on student outcomes remained limited. Although leadership mattered, it was more evident through the actions of others. In schools, this meant teachers (Earley, 2017). As such, Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009) found that leaders needed to set clear goals for students and teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning. These goals, or objectives, needed to be achievable and able to be

delivered by teachers who were well trained. Although vision and targets were important, practical application was needed to realize the leader's vision.

Through this, how leaders enacted change then required them to focus on developing capacity in others. Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009) and Earl in Timperley *et al.* (2007, p.vii) found that this was because 'what teachers know and are able to do' had a significant impact on student outcomes. However, Earl in Timperley *et al.* (2007) also stated that to engage teachers in professional learning, leaders needed to know which approaches to teacher learning were likely to be the most effective. This mattered because in asking teachers to explore new practices, existing beliefs were likely to be challenged. To support this, research (Timperley *et al.*, 2007; Greany, 2017; OECD, 2019) identified that leaders needed to focus on creating the conditions for teacher learning through resourcing and time.

Literature (DeRue and Ashford, 2010; Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2019; Chapman, 2019) also found that when considering the leader's focus on developing teacher practice, context was important. Given that such development required strong organizational skills in addition to time and resources, studies (Higham, Hopkins, Matthews, 2009; Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd, 2009; McAleavy and Riggall, 2016) also showed that leaders may not have sufficient capacity to develop practice. Literature (Leithwood, Harris and Strauss, 2010; Greany, 2018; OFSTED, 2018) identified this was particularly pertinent when considering the challenges of a

struggling school. Early priorities were likely to focus on securing stability, of which teacher practice might not be a part, evidenced by the National College in 2011. They conducted a mixed methods study which found that schools most wanted support in leadership development (79%) and leadership of teaching and learning (71%). This highlighted the challenges faced by school leaders as their focus could depend on the context of the school and the capacity of the leaders to develop teacher practice.

Alternatively, Branch, Hanushek, and Rivkin (2013) stated that whilst improving the practice of teachers mattered, focusing on developing the practice of school leaders could be more urgent. This was because leaders have a wider influence across a school. Fullan (2007), OECD (2014) and Gibson (2018) agreed that school leaders provided the link between teachers, students, parents, the community, and the wider education system. This meant, school problems were rarely solved in isolation (Fullan, 2019). Additionally, focusing on the efficacy in school leaders might enable leaders to collectively solve problems (Heifetz, 2009). The challenge here was that different leaders held different perspectives regarding what to focus on first and how to approach this (Fullan, 2019). Exploring how and what leaders concentrated on in a sponsored academy context could therefore add to existing understandings. Moreover, studying leadership roles across a single MAT might provide an interesting comparison with those who occupy the same leadership roles in single

schools in the same MAT. To inform this, a discussion of claims and evidence related to school leadership follows. A summary is provided in Table 4:

Table 4: Summary of key ideas in School Leadership Focus

Key ideas that inform the research design:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The role of the school leader and what they focus on has changed.• Financial and estate management was distributed to school leaders at a time when government retained control of the curriculum• Context matters when identifying what leaders should focus on first. Teacher practice might not be the priority.• Leaders need to know which approaches to professional development are effective.• Leaders in struggling schools often want support with developing leaders and improving teacher practice.

3.4 Claims for the efficacy of school leadership in school improvement

From a review of the role of leaders in school improvement, it became clear that leaders increasingly needed to possess the skills and knowledge to develop teacher practice which impacted on student outcomes. Yet this was set in a context which showed that the styles that they adopted varied. Moreover, the range of actors who contributed to school improvement have diversified at a similar pace to the increase in the range of schools a teacher might go on to lead. This section will consider the key claims relating to school leadership.

Firstly, literature (Leithwood *et al.*, 2008; OECD, 2014; Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd, 2009) found that there was a clear need and role for leadership in schooling.

However, there was limited agreement concerning the roles and approaches that might be adopted by leaders which left them unsure of what to prioritize or value (Ball, 2003; Leithwood *et al.*, 2019). The issue was further exemplified in government policy concerning academies. Furthermore, Fullan (2007) noted that the government stated there was no single approach to forming or leading a MAT, or more widely, there was no 'one size fits all' approach.

Additionally, the role of the Principal as an administrator was questioned. Branch, *et al.* (2013) used data between 1995 and 2001 for 7,420 Principals and student outcomes to identify that an effective school leader was one who could improve teacher practice and that leaders needed to be able to bring about change to transform a school (Creemers and Kyriakides, 2008; Schleicher, 2012; OECD, 2014; Fullan, 2016). As such, instructional leadership was increasingly seen to have a positive impact on the development of classroom practice, which in turn, led to an improvement in student outcomes (CUREE, 2009; Parlar and Cansoy, 2017).

Markholt, Michelson and Fink (2018) described how effective leaders could develop teacher practice rather than being limited to administrative or operational tasks. This represented a change in perception concerning what defined school leadership. This was explored through interviews to establish what leaders' most immediate priorities were in their contexts. This was important because research varied concerning how long improvement should take. Fullan (2007) stated that school

leadership, in particularly demanding situations, was rarely straightforward. Yet in challenging times, Heifetz (1994) and Fullan (2019) identified that fast improvement may be sought at the expense of quality (Fullan, 2016). Chapman, Muji and MacAllister (2011) identified that improvement might take between two and four years whilst MacBeath *et al.*, (2007) named five to seven years for schools which have typically struggled for ten years. Fullan (2016) on the other hand, named ten years for institutional change to occur. Whilst there was variation in terms of timescales, there was agreement that leaders should resist pressure to devise short-term, unsustainable solutions (Chapman, 2004).

Others resisted specific timescales, instead concluding that effective leadership engaged people's values (Bollen in Reynolds *et al.*, 1996). Heifetz (1994) and Fullan (2019) described how this required clarity of thought, additional resource, and a consistent approach (Reynolds, Potter and Chapman, 2001) to solve complex problems. Heifetz (1994) identified how it was likely that others would go on to situate their professional lives through their enactment of a leader's vision. Accordingly, leaders must act in a way clearly situated in moral purpose which might challenge notions of rapid, time-limited improvement (Bass and Riggio, 2008; Waldman, Galvin and Walumba, 2012). Leaders were also required to balance these demands with unintended negative consequences associated with high stakes accountability. This further strengthened Heifetz's (2009) point that effective leadership needed to be considered. As such, House of Commons (2017a) described

how situations of pressure were perceived to require the strongest leaders and as Leithwood *et al.* (2006) stated, were potentially, the places where the greatest impact could be made.

Over time, there was also a change in the belief that leadership could only be provided by school leaders. Literature (Schleicher, 2012; Hargreaves 2014; Diamond and Spillane, 2016) suggested this was true in the context of teacher leadership and more widely, Hopkins (2013) and Hargreaves (2014) stated, system leadership. Through the emergence of the MAT, government (Gov.uk) data indicated those able to lead diversified. NCTL (2014) and Gunter (2012) stated this included business leaders, universities, other schools, faith, or voluntary groups. Indeed, sponsors were not necessarily expected to have come from a teaching background. Instead, NCTL (2014, part 4) identified, they needed to be able to demonstrate that they could challenge previously accepted ways of thinking to: 'break with cultures of low aspirations which afflict too many communities and their schools' and build capacity (Brown and Flood, 2020). As such, Brown and Flood (2020) went on to state that the unit of analysis being the individual school may be too small in scale to provide rich learning environments for teacher development.

Finally, sponsors were responsible for improving the performance of their schools. Sponsor-led academies when taken over, were viewed as new legal entities and schools did not retain their inspection history. Junemann and Ball (2013, p.424)

identified that this could lead to a development in the language of leadership in schools, and the wider policy arena, as 'new actors and voices in policy conversations' emerged. Junemann and Ball (2013, p.424) also described how philanthropic sponsors became more influential, which could be linked to 'blurring the demarcation lines between state and market'.

3.5 Evidence regarding the claims for school leadership effects

In reviewing the literature (Creemers and Kyriakides, 2008; Hargreaves, 2014; OECD, 2014; Leithwood *et al.*, 2019) concerning effective school leadership, key ideas were grouped into claims so that evidence to support or challenge these, could be considered. As such, effective leaders:

1. Secured school improvement
2. Improved teacher practice
3. Improved student outcomes
4. Engaged in collaborative approaches

Claim 1: Effective leaders secure school improvement.

The role of professionals leading school improvement remained relatively unknown. Whilst there was agreement that school leaders have an important role in ensuring

the organization of schools and in turn, influence teaching and learning (Leithwood *et al.*, 2019), OECD (2014) found that the role of the Principal was still under-researched. This was despite the publication of individual anecdotal accounts (Stubbs, 2003; Coates, 2015; Dunford, 2016) written by school leaders. Hargreaves (2010, p.18) suggested that if analysis could 'separate what they do (leadership) from who they are (leaders)', practices could be 'captured, codified and taught to others, often through mentoring and coaching'.

Secondly, Mourshed, Chikioke and Barber (2010) and Macdonald, Burke, and Stewart (2018) noted that context was important to leaders bringing about improvement. This developed research undertaken by Ball (2003) who suggested that a singular replicable model could not support all schools. More broadly, Macdonald, Burke, and Stewart (2018) identified that different organisations employed different people. As such, they would hold different ideas regarding approaches to take in the workplace. In an educational context, this was reflected in that an agreed definition for System Leadership in education had yet to be achieved. MATs were seen in government policy and school practice as being important, yet the Department for Education (DfE 2018d) did not mention this specifically in its own definition of System Leadership. Instead, it focused on other collaborative contexts detailed in Table 5:

Table 5: Contexts for System Leadership

System Leader Type	In brief	June 2018 (DfE 2019c)	June 2019 (DfE 2019d)	Change
Teaching School Alliance	One or more Teaching School/s working collaboratively to deliver and benefit from initial teacher training, professional development, and school-to-school support programmes.	668	631	37 (6%) decrease
Teaching School	An individual school judged to be 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by OFSTED, engaged in initial teacher training and professional development for teachers.	835	718	117 (14%) decrease
National Leader of Education	Headteachers leading 'Outstanding' schools, by OFSTED grading who supported schools in challenging circumstances.	1319	1182	137 (10%) decrease
National Leader of Governance	Effective Chairs of Governors who used their skills to support others.	442	383	59 (13%) decrease

Taken from: DfE, 2019c; DfE, 2019d.

The data suggested that these groups of system leaders had decreased between June 2018 and June 2019. Though Teaching School Alliances offered three main types of support between schools, their dominant provision lay in initial teacher training (DfE, 2017). The same reports did not include the reasons for this decline. They did however contradict the government's own narrative claiming to expand this version of system leadership in education. These classifications (DfE, 2019c; DfE, 2019d) excluded middle leaders who contributed to a system led approach; Specialist Leaders of Education (Clarke, 2017) and indeed, leaders of MATs engaged in school-to-school support through academy sponsorship.

The House of Commons Education Select Committee (2017a) found that although MATs have increased, in contrast to system leaders described, there was a lack of research that defined what successful trusts did to improve schools. This concurred with studies (Chapman, 2013; Chapman and Mujis, 2013; Chapman, 2015) which found that there was 'a paucity' of empirical research into the complexities of academy leadership and school improvement in multi-school settings (Greany, 2018). To establish this, Greany (2018) carried out 231 semi-structured interviews with MAT and school leaders, focus groups and a survey. In addition, Chapman (2013) synthesised seven years of research and noted that most existing studies were limited to being commissioned from within government. One explanation could be that academies grew at a faster rate than evidence detailing their impact on student outcomes or their community. Whilst the research undertaken did not consider whether the MAT was effective, it explored the leadership of a single MAT from multiple points of view, to contribute to existing evidence concerning the complexities of academy leadership.

Claim 2: Effective leaders improve teacher practice.

The second claim was that effective leaders focused on improving teacher practice. This was more easily demonstrated through some forms of leadership than others. Mourshed and Barber (2007), Mujis and Reynold (2017) and Leithwood *et al.* (2019)

found evidence that teachers mattered particularly in terms of the influence of a strong teacher on student outcomes. There was also evidence (Chapman, 2019; OECD, 2019) that investing and developing a collaborative culture supported teachers to develop practice which could positively influence outcomes. Using longitudinal, quantitative studies, Mourshed and Barber (2007) showed that students taught by consistently strong teachers learned three times faster than those taught by a less strong teacher with the earlier impact being seen in low attaining students. The study was given further purpose through data which found that students who struggled at age 11 only had a 25% chance of catching up by the age of 14.

In terms of whether effective leaders improved teacher practice, an effect size of 0.4 was considered to have a greater than average effect on student achievement (Hattie, 2009). An effect size of greater than one was equivalent to a child making two grades progress at GCSE. Instructional leadership was found to have an effect size of 0.66 overall. Mourshed and Barber (2007), Hattie (2009) and OECD (2014) found that in a secondary school setting, this was 0.44 compared to an average effect size of leadership overall of 0.36 (Hattie, 2009). For comparison, Branch *et al.* (2013) found that the impact of an individual Principal in their first three years of tenure in the United States had an effect size of 0.21 compared to one who was ineffective. The data correlated with OECD (2014) data of Principals' views in twenty countries that instructional leadership practices were seen as important in improving

student outcomes. However, OECD, (2014) also found that from their sample of 34 countries, that 90% of Principals reported that they did not teach, instead they spent 41% of their time working on administrative related tasks, not linked to the development of teachers.

Furthermore, being able to work with teachers in instructional practices was complex. A commitment of time to undertake this work was required (Fullan, 2016; Brown and Flood, 2020). Moreover, literature (Fink and Silverman, 2014; Greany, 2017; OECD, 2019) identified that few schools and MATs had created the conditions to reduce Principal administrative responsibility to enable them to affect teaching practice at scale. In addition, Davies (2018) suggested that literature often assumed that teachers wanted to improve, whilst Fullan (2019) questioned whether leaders were capable in their role and had knowledge that would be relevant to their context. Consequently, Davies (2018, p.180) stated that little reference was made in literature to the challenges of this approach meaning that changing a teacher's practice may be 'simply a shot in the dark'.

Moreover, school leaders responsible for carrying out instructional leadership could also be insufficiently trained in what good teaching practices looked like (Fink, 2009; Schleicher, 2012; OECD, 2014; Hvidston *et al.*, 2015). In addition, leaders might not know which approaches to use, particularly in relation to individual subjects in secondary schools. Fink (2009, p.44) therefore concluded that a shift in focus was

required to enable leaders to know teachers as 'individual learners and apply the same instructional focus to developing teachers that teachers use [to] develop students.' Overall, the literature suggests that a key priority for leaders resided in the development of teacher practice. However, implementing this in practice was not without its challenges.

Claim 3: Effective leaders improved student outcomes.

The third claim, that effective leaders improved student outcomes suggested variable evidence (Kreemers and Kyriakides, 2008; Chapman, 2013, Diamond and Spillane, 2016) when focused on summative examinations as an indicator of leadership effectiveness. Firstly, such an approach was a time-limited insight. Alternative options such as qualifications gained at university were not reliable because there was variation among universities, courses, and providers (Davies, 2018). Furthermore, Keep and Mayhew (2014) found that data from the employment of students as a measure of educational effectiveness, candidates were over-qualified for positions, or demand for jobs outstripped supply. This had inadvertently created the effect of 'all education can do is add more competitors into the race' (Keep and Mayhew, 2014, p.772).

Another issue in evidencing the link between student outcomes and successful leadership was that there was no single approach to school improvement which

could be used in isolation (Diamond and Spillane, 2016). Bhattacharya (2013) explained that although system leadership had seen much expansion in England, research (Chapman, 2013; Bragg, 2014; Meyers and Smylie, 2017) showed that there remained a lack of evidence concerning its effectiveness in raising student achievement both in England and the United States. Both Coe (2009) and Hargreaves (2010) concluded that success in one setting did not guarantee that this could be transferred to another. Hargreaves (2010) also indicated that transferring practice rather than culture was limited. Similarly, Coe (2009) found that whilst distributing the leadership of teaching and learning created the perception among teachers and leaders that things were improving, it did not guarantee success when measured by student attainment.

Moreover, Mujis *et al.* (2004) showed that adopting a culture of teacher leadership to help teachers deepen their knowledge of teaching and learning to improve outcomes also appeared problematic. One issue was that teachers experimented with approaches unlikely to contribute positively towards increasing student achievement. This view was supported by Fullan (2019) who pointed out that leaders in turnaround situations tended to focus on what needed to be done without enough care for how this might look in practice. Further to this, literature (Creemers and Kyriakides, 2008; Menon, 2011; Branch, Hanushek, and Rivkin, 2013) found that even where there was agreement that effective leadership broadly led to improved student outcomes, it was challenging to identify the specific impact of Principals.

Claim 4: Effective leaders engaged in collaborative approaches.

The work of improving schools was no longer solely the domain of the individual school leader. A strong motivation for collaboration across school systems emerged more widely (Brown and Flood, 2020). Indeed, studies (Goss 2005 in Hill *et al.*, 2012; Schleicher, 2012, Fullan, 2016; Brown and Flood, 2020) identified that working collaboratively was perceived as not only the responsibility of a school leader, but characteristic of an effective approach.

Evidence of collaboration are discussed throughout Chapter 3 through leadership style, role, and focus. Notable examples of successful between school collaboration existed in the London Challenge from 2003 – 2008, the City Challenge focused on Greater Manchester and the Black Country Challenge in the West Midlands from 2008 – 2011. Evaluation of these longitudinal programmes identified that factors contributing to their success and professional networks more widely (Brown and Flood, 2020) were, the length of time leaders gave to bring about change, how they established an ethos of trust and collaboration, a collective sense of responsibility rather than high stakes accountability and analysis of support to individual schools (Berwick and John, 2017). In this example, research (Hutchings and Masaray, 2013; Ainscow, 2015; Greany, 2017) identified an explicit avoidance of a 'one size fits all' approach where leaders repositioned the struggling school as a 'Key to Success' rather than a place of failure. Roles such as National Leaders of Education and Teaching Schools evolved from the programme, though recent data (DfE, 2019c;

DfE, 2019d), tabled earlier in sections 3.1.6 and 3.5, showed they had diminished in numbers.

However, identifying the impact of collaboration in relation to student outcomes was more challenging (Armstrong, Brown and Chapman, 2020; Brown and Flood, 2020). In relation to the London Challenge, whilst there was agreement (Berwick and John, 2017; Gill, 2018), that children from disadvantaged backgrounds made rapid progress and strong attainment compared to other regions, Leckie and Goldstein (2018) used 2016 government student outcomes data to show that when contextual factors were considered, the effects were diminished. Both Wilson, Burgess and Briggs (2009) and Leckie and Goldstein (2018) also showed that intakes broadly comprised large groups of students whose ethnicity and English as an Additional Language status were identified with strong performance in high stakes GCSE examinations. Moreover, whilst intensive support was provided to inadequate schools and those leading the improvement; schools graded OFSTED 'Satisfactory' or 'Good', were not able to readily access the same support suggesting an inequity in provision.

The evidence explored in this section, together with earlier examples cited in the broader examination of the leadership context in this chapter, highlighted some aspects of leadership practice and roles which might broadly encourage collaboration between schools. Because this study explores how school and MAT

leaders nurtured relationships and enacted organisational change (Armstrong, Brown, and Chapman, 2020), in Chapter 4, this wider lens will narrow to focus on the struggling school context. This will then inform an analysis of the leadership of the Multi-Academy Trust setting in Chapter 5. A summary of this discussion is tabled:

Table 6: Summary of claims and evidence for the efficacy of school leadership in school improvement

Key ideas that inform the research design:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There was limited agreement on their role and the approaches they should take.• Effective school leaders are perceived to be those who can improve teacher practice. Evidence suggests some roles are declining. School leaders might also be insufficiently trained in Instructional Leadership.• There was a variation in understanding of how long school improvement should take but there is agreement that strong teaching matters.• Understanding school context was important when considering improvement measures.• The view that the only people who can improve schools are school leaders has changed. The MAT Policy is an example of this. Yet the work of professionals in struggling schools relatively unknown.• MATs are increasingly a key part of System Leadership in schools. But few MATs create the conditions for teachers / leaders to work together.

CHAPTER 4: LITERATURE REVIEW

THE STRUGGLING SCHOOL CONTEXT

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the struggling school context (Kutash *et al.* 2010; Leithwood, Harris, Strauss, 2010; Chapman and Harris, 2010). The MAT that is the focus of this case study is associated with schools that have historically underperformed. This chapter also considers recent government policy concerning the leadership of the struggling school (DfE, 2016; Berkovich, 2018) and school collaboration (Hargreaves, 2010; DfE, 2016). Finally, this chapter explores challenges (Ball, 2003; Clegg *et al.*, 2017) faced by leaders and strategies (Hill, 2010; Gibb, 2015; Wiliam, 2016) adopted. Such details could add value to an exploration of the challenges experienced by leaders in sponsored academies. Literature was therefore organised into the following sections:

- Defining the Struggling School Context
- Policy portrayals of 'struggling schools'
- Challenges facing struggling schools
- Strategies to improve struggling schools - claims and evidence.

4.2 Defining the Struggling School Context

Definitions of the struggling school varied in literature. From a policy perspective, Berkovich (2018) suggested that English government policy contained no consistent definition of schools in challenging circumstances. However, in 2010, in the United States of America, Kutash *et al.* (2010, p.4) cited the turnaround school as one failing to improve outcomes year on year. They then defined the term 'turnaround' as one that required the dramatic and comprehensive intervention in a low-performing school within two years. This readied the school for the longer process of transformation into a high-performance organisation.'

The struggling school was different to an underperforming school because it required 'major' (Reynolds, Potter and Chapman., 2002, p. 248) or 'radical intervention' (Leithwood, Harris, Strauss, 2010, p.13). Factors contributing to the failure included the socio-economic context, individualised culture, and organisational failure which 'renders many schools unable to cope' (Leithwood, Harris, Strauss, 2010, p.39). They also noted that 'for every failing school, the mix is different'. This highlighted the complexity and importance of understanding each school context (Stoll *et al.*, in Reynolds *et al.*, 1996; Chapman, 2004; MacBeath *et al.*, 2007). Through this, Chapman and Harris (2010, pp.424) added that such schools become immobile, as in a state of "paralysis" and "crisis". These were different to a school low in capacity for self-improvement. Where Kutash *et al.* (2010, p.5)

advocated a structured response as turnaround, followed by restart, closure and transformation, Chapman and Harris (2004, pp.419) reminded that 'simply getting to the starting line for improvement' was challenging. As such, external support may be necessary (Stoll *et al.*, in Reynolds *et al.*, 1996).

Contributing to the struggle were the limited number of providers willing to engage in collaboration. Hargreaves (2010) stated that the idea that a successful school would have the skills to help another become equally successful, were not guaranteed as contexts varied. This suggested that school improvement, particularly in struggling schools was challenging to define and where contributing factors were known, they could not be easily articulated.

4.3 Policy portrayals of 'struggling schools'

Adonis (2012) cited the 1870 Education Act as the first piece of legislation making a commitment to education on a national scale in England. It was concerned with the architecture of the school, the defining of the teacher and curriculum and the expansion of buildings, which often resembled the factory. Over time, Adonis (2012) explained that the growth of MATs represented the fourth phase of state school development after primary schools from 1870, secondary schools from 1902, and secondary modern schools from 1944.

More recently, government (DfE, 2016) positioned the notion of the struggling school in the solution: a system led approach. Here, MATs were identified as having a key role to play. In the White Paper, 'Educational Excellence Everywhere' DfE, (2016, p.4) the government sought to 'ensure the profession had the tools it needs to succeed: improving teacher training and ensuring a strong, diverse pipeline' of leaders. However, Chief Ofsted Inspector, Amanda Spielman noted that one challenge faced by the struggling school was the capacity to secure improvement. In her Annual Report of 2017 (OFSTED, 2017), she differed to the DfE (2016) and questioned whether a limited number of academy sponsors had the capacity to provide the support required. Referring to a four-year period (2013 – 2017), OFSTED (2017) found that there was little or no improvement in the number of schools inspected having moved from the category of 'Requires Improvement'. Reasons included recruitment issues; including the headteacher; inaccurate self-evaluation, such as 'failure to connect the quality of teaching to pupils' outcomes', (OFSTED 2017, p.33); variable middle leadership and poor attendance and behaviour.

Moreover, struggling schools struggled to sustain improvement. In the same period, the percentage of schools declining to 'inadequate' almost doubled from 6% to 11%, due in part OFSTED (2017) claimed to schools struggling to appropriately allocate additional funding (Pupil Premium), to improve disadvantaged students' outcomes. In addition, OFSTED (2018) identified that of 149 outstanding schools inspected in 2017/18, only 33% (49) remained so, with 30% (45) schools declining

further. Additionally, OFSTED (2018, p.45) stated, 190 secondary schools had been 'stuck' in these two categories since 2005. OFSTED (2020a) also noted that secondary schools were more likely to be in this situation, than primary schools. Reasons for this included schools receiving too much poor-quality advice on how to improve. Effective support was however most valuable when led by the school but supported strategically and focused on behaviour, teaching and systems for accountability (OFSTED, 2020b). More research was needed to develop a deeper understanding of specifically, what the support looked like in practice and how it is provided (OFSTED, 2020b).

4.4 Challenges facing struggling schools

Literature (Leithwood, Harris, Strauss, 2010; Golan, 2015; McAleavy and Riggall, 2016; OFSTED; 2017; Papanastasiou, 2017) showed that not enough was known about the everyday experiences of teachers and leaders. Leithwood, Harris and Strauss (2010, p.13) stated that most existing research focused on schools that 'require a lift in performance, rather than radical intervention'. Consequently, leaders had limited access to guidance and as such, created overly complicated plans (Fullan, 2016). Moreover, the challenges they faced may be so complex that they do not know what to focus on first. Ball (2003) added that there was a lack of understanding concerning what to monitor, what to value and what to prioritise and

as such, plans needed to be flexible and aligned to each school's context and needs (Chapman *et al.*, 2011). Kutash *et al.* (2010, p.6) also identified that this could result in leaders feeling 'unprepared for the severity of the student needs and school issues that had to be addressed', which Ball (2003) identified could cause personal anxiety and self-doubt.

Another challenge faced by the struggling school was its inability to recruit and retain strong teachers and leaders (Chapman, 2004; MacBeath *et al.*, 2007). Clegg *et al.* (2017) used the 1970 British Cohort Study, a longitudinal survey of over 17,000 babies, to identify that inequality persisted through highly qualified teachers being likely to teach in more affluent areas. This, together with Leckie and Goldstein's (2018) finding that Progress 8 performance further contributed towards school achievement being misrepresented, could be related to the idea that children from areas of higher deprivation having little access to experienced teachers.

Moreover, McAleavy and Riggall (2016) identified that those teachers were more likely to be led by inexperienced leaders not trained in how to challenge or improve poor teaching, or once trained, left the school rendering professional development "counterproductive" (MacBeath *et al.*, 2007, p.93). In their survey of 260,000 teachers, in 15,000 schools across 48 countries, OECD (2019) found that further instability followed with leaders being 70% more likely to leave the school than those in neighbouring, more prosperous schools. Additionally, Clegg *et al.* (2017)

found that pupils in more deprived areas were more likely to be taught by teachers who did not have a degree in their subject. Equally, teachers may be uncomfortable discussing students' socioeconomic status (Chapman *et al.*, 2011). Together with a lack of access to highly qualified teachers, the challenges faced by the struggling school were further exacerbated.

The recruitment of teachers was further undermined by national challenges outside of an individual school's control. These included government changes to school curriculum that did not consider the impact on teacher supply. This was further challenging considering that subject recruitment declined in 2016 (DfE, 2017a; Ward, 2017). Moreover, those entering the teaching profession in 2016 were 43,380 (House of Commons, 2017a; See and Gorard, 2019) whilst 42,830 teachers left the profession in the same year. Literature (DfE, 2017; House of Commons, 2017a; Busby, 2018) also identified that for five years, government targets for initial teacher education were not achieved.

Cater (2017) added insight into these challenges by noting that routes into teacher training were complex, with providers being unevenly distributed regionally. See and Gorard (2019) suggested that this, together with providers being risk averse, contributed towards applicants experiencing high rejection rates (79% in 2017). Consequently, research (Branch *et al.*, 2013; Clegg *et al.*, 2017; OFSTED, 2017) found that families had limited access through their local schools to strong teaching, often

for several years. Clegg *et al.* (2017) also noted that the recruitment and retention of teachers with higher qualifications, support with housing or establishing an expectation that senior leaders have served in disadvantaged communities prior to headship could be considered. However, Kutash *et al.* (2010) pointed out that too few universities were able to train the large number of teachers, principals, and support staff needed.

Over time, OFSTED (2017) identified that the struggle intensified because of weak teaching and leadership. This was represented through a focus on student outcomes, seen in high stakes accountability, linked to individual teacher responsibility (Ball, 2003). The existing Progress 8 (Beckett, 2014) method, which captured Key Stage 4 student achievement compared to all students from a similar Key Stage 2 starting point (Gov.uk), excluded socioeconomic factors (MacBeath *et al.*, 2007) or the elements of school culture such as pastoral care. If the school was further reduced in status by the “blunter instrument” (MacBeath *et al.*, 2007, p.33) of the inspectorate, the challenge only increased (Chapman, 2004; MacBeath *et al.*, 2007; Beckett, 2014).

Another consequence of such measures was that teachers were reluctant to remain in post in challenging contexts. Leckie and Goldstein (2018, p.2) showed that high stakes accountability perpetuated bias towards schools in advantaged settings as leaders were ‘likely to reward and punish the wrong schools’. The impact on teachers

could also be evident in that such information could cause leaders to be 'imprecise' in using identifying the effectiveness of individual teachers (William, 2016, p.43) leaving teachers reluctant to take up such positions as they were perceived to be risky (Leckie and Goldstein, 2018).

4.5 Strategies to improve struggling schools: claims and evidence

To understand the role of school leaders and teachers in struggling schools, attempts have been made to describe their work. Whilst Chapman (2004) identified that leaders in schools in challenging circumstances adopted common approaches to improvement, these were carried out with varying levels of distributed leadership. On the other hand, Fryer (2015) found that leaders themselves were unable to 'precisely communicate in a way that could be put into a pill and packaged what made them successful' (Fryer, 2015). Strategies included tutoring for students, performance management of teachers (Whelan, 2009; Mourshed, Chijioke and Barber 2010), targeted support for individual students in receipt of Free School Meals (Chapman *et al.*, 2011) or extending the school day (Mourshed, Chijioke and Barber, 2010; Garner, 2014 and Gibb, 2015).

To support the issue of high proportions of inexperienced teachers and leaders being characteristic of a struggling school, Berliner (2004) found that context free approaches to mentoring helped novice teachers. Similarly, Allen and Sims (2018)

stated that they had insufficient experience to have developed analogies, automaticity or routine that were found to be characteristic of expert teachers whilst noting that moments in teachers' days were too individual to categorise. To support coaching and mentoring of teacher practice, Lemov (2015, p.4) identified a solution of putting 'names on techniques in the interest of helping create a common vocabulary to analyse and discuss the classroom'. Hill (2010) noted these approaches were of interest to MAT leaders such as the Harris Federation.

Furthermore, Angrist *et al.* (2012) and Reynolds *et al.*, (2002) identified that initially leadership focused on agreed approaches and school culture. This was in the belief, Pike (2009) and Golan (2015) stated, that improvements would, over time, translate into student outcomes. One example was 'Knowledge is Power Programme' (KIPP), America's largest Charter School organisation of 242 schools. They focused on developing students' academic strength as well as character, instructional approaches to the coaching and mentoring of teachers and selection of principals (Garner, 2014; Gibb, 2015). Whelan (2009) suggested that students outperformed when compared to the national average in Reading and Mathematics whilst Clark Tuttle *et al.* (2015) claimed that some KIPP schools were more successful than others. This led to interest, Gibb (2015) stated, from the UK government which will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

To underpin such an approach, external support and school collaboration through governance arrangements emerged. Chapman (2013) and Hattie (2015a) explored collaborative networking and suggested that perceiving shared approaches as a structural solution could not address deeper issues in schooling. Previously, Chapman (2004) found that successful leaders understood the importance of flexibility, adapting and dispersing leadership at different stages of the school's improvement journey. Aligned to this, Coe (2009) indicated that a school must lead improvement from within. However, a collaborative approach could not guarantee that staff were able or available to support others. With the evolution of such support requiring direct intervention from school leaders, literature (Schleicher, 2012; Chapman, 2013; Chapman, 2019) showed that middle and senior leaders then absorbed responsibilities associated with headship. This created questions around whether staff remaining had the capacity to sustain improvement in the 'lead' school.

Moreover, many strategies were not particular to the struggling school context (Leithwood, Harris, Strauss, 2010). Mongon and Chapman (2011) and Wiliam (2018) stated that if schools improved the practice of their lowest performing teachers to those of their highest performing ones, a significant contribution towards improving the school could occur. Markholt, Michelson and Fink (2018) and Wiliam (2018) found, such a view fitted with debates concerning teacher shortages and invested in Professional Learning Communities and instructional coaching. In time, Chapman

(2004) and Chapman *et al.*, (2011) identified, seeking a collaborative culture could create a more sustainable approach to the wider social process of school improvement.

To support this, another consideration was time. Whelan (2009) indicated that in Singapore teachers were entitled to one hundred hours of professional development every year whilst teachers in Shanghai spent significant periods of time reflecting on practice and sharing planning (Wiliam, 2016; Mujis and Reynolds, 2018). To support this, class sizes remained large, and teachers' salaries aligned with professions such as accountants and lawyers (Whelan, 2009). In lessons, effective feedback to students and encouraging collaborative learning were found to be low cost and effective in improving student outcomes. The Educational Endowment Foundation (2018) and Wiliam (2018) showed these strategies were not limited to struggling schools and contrasted with reducing class sizes or individual tuition more traditionally associated with government policy attempting to raise standards in schools (Whelan, 2009).

In summary, studies showed a range of strategies which school leaders adopted in seeking practical solutions to the challenges of the challenging school context. These provided a starting point when structuring interview questions and identifying potential documents for inclusion in this study. Key points for this chapter are noted in Table 7.

Table 7: Summary of key ideas arising in policy and practice in struggling schools

<p>Key ideas that inform the research design:</p> <p>Policy portrayals of 'struggling schools'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy now concerned with the need to improve schools • Academy sponsors do not necessarily have the capacity to support the numbers of struggling schools • No consistent definition of a struggling school in England government policy. <p>Challenges facing struggling schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Much research focused on limited change rather than dramatic improvement. • Not enough is known about the everyday experiences of teachers and leaders in struggling schools. They have limited access to guidance. • It is difficult for leaders to know what to focus on first. • It is difficult to recruit and retain teachers in the struggling school. • Experienced teachers may be reluctant to work in struggling schools. <p>Strategies to improve struggling schools: claims and evidence</p> <p>Strategies included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intervention programmes for students • Collaboration between teachers has positive benefits but teachers must have the opportunity to do this. Increasing professional development time for teachers each week.

CHAPTER 5: LITERATURE REVIEW

MULTI-ACADEMY TRUSTS

5.1 Introduction

Following a review of the literature concerning struggling schools, this chapter focuses on the government policy response. Framed within a wider discussion of collaboration theory, Adnett and Davies (2010) and Chapman (2015) found that informal collaboration between schools was established, whilst Ball (2009) stated that more formal arrangements, linked through governance, remained a relatively recent phenomenon. Literature and government documents have been reviewed to track the development and implementation of MAT policy, and to consider if the original intentions have been achieved.

Two types of school discussed in the chapter in relation to MATs are the sponsored and the converter academy. Sponsored academies were typically but not exclusively, low achieving and voluntarily or forcibly joined a trust (Adonis, 2012; Gunter in Gunter, 2012; Courtney, 2015; Greany and McGinity, 2021). Converter Academies on the other hand, were defined as high performing by OFSTED judgement. This

distinction, Greany and McGinity (2021) stated, influenced the nature of the relationship the school was likely to have with the MAT.

5.2 School Collaboration Theory

5.2.1 Definition

Sullivan and Skelcher (2002) stated that collaboration in public services could be defined as a means of working alongside others on a shared interest. It allowed traditionally accepted boundaries to be less rigidly observed in the pursuit of positive outcomes. Sullivan and Skelcher (2002) described how public policy became increasingly located in collaboration, which engaged a range of actors from government, business, and community contexts. Furthermore, Ball (2009) described how formal collaboration between schools, through governance remained a recent, experimental phenomenon but one which Fullan (2015) stated was necessary for leading changes in schools. Davies (2010) and Chapman (2015) both indicated that schools working together informally were more likely to be established through networks to share practice. Indeed, Chapman (2015, p.560) identified collaboration as being 'within, between and beyond-school perspectives' working together, rather than in isolation. Over time, partnership needed to include children and parents in the pursuit of greater equity for communities (Chapman, 2019).

5.2.2 Benefits

Adnett and Davies (2010) stated that formal collaboration emerged in the White Paper *Excellence in Schools* in 1997 with "collaboration, networking, or partnership [being] key words in the new policy lexicon" (MacBeath *et al.*, 2007, p.38). The policy indicated a shift from competition-orientated models and less focused on the contribution of the individual (Colbry, Hurwitz and Adair, 2014). Collaboration was perceived to enable co-operation and compliance where there was not an imbalance of power between two parties (Colbry, Hurwitz and Adair, 2014; Chapman, 2019).

Collaboration might also be beneficial in economic terms. Adnett and Davies (2010) stated that collaboration could be associated with cost saving through economies of scale or the emergence of a professional culture rooted in the sharing of knowledge. Furthermore, Frickel, Prainsack and Albert (2017) and Chapman (2019) identified that shared thinking could be linked with greater innovation and increased equity through professionals from different disciplines working together to support communities. In a broader context, Bauman (2008) contrasted close-knit communities based on long-established, shared histories and expectations of permanence being replaced with temporary, loose-knit community arrangements which were less dependent on relationships. Members could belong to a range of communities. These were more 'porous' (Chapman *et al.*, 2011; Chapman, 2019, p.558) and supported the sharing of ideas for the greater good without the boundaries more closely associated with the close-knit community.

5.2.3 Limitations

Collaborative working was not though, without its shortcomings. Research (Adnett and Davies, 2010; Frickel, Prainsack, Albert, 2017; Nowotny, 2017) suggested that there was a gap between interdisciplinary working and lived practice. Increased accountability through measures such as school performance tables contradicted the collaboration as they celebrated individualism (Armstrong, Brown and Chapman, 2020). Adnett and Davies (2010) identified that this, in turn, discouraged collaboration between schools. Although educational professionals perceived sharing practice as beneficial and linked to increased efficacy, it was more difficult to track the impact in improving student outcomes (Ball, 2009; Coe, 2009; Adnett and Davies, 2010).

Another challenge to collaboration was the issue of in-school, between classroom variation. Literature (Stoll *et al.*, in Reynolds *et al.*, 1996; NCSL, 2011a; OECD, 2013; Hattie, 2015b; Davies, 2018) found this was more of a threat to a school's success, than variation between schools. This challenged government narratives concerning the importance of collaboration. Additionally, Hutching and Francis (2018) found that those trusts claimed by government to perform well when measured by student outcomes, were slow to share approaches or develop scalable models. Furthermore, sharing practice required teachers to engage in 'deprivatising their practice' which had been negatively associated with accountability through monitoring (Fullan and Quinn, 2015, p.117).

5.2 Multi-Academy Policy

Academies remain 'unique' within English educational policy (Woods and Woods, 2009, p.94). The 1998 Education Reform Act paved the way for them through a narrative of autonomy and increased parental choice in schooling (Bhattacharya, 2013; Bragg, 2014). This was initially evident in Grant Maintained Schools, City Technology Colleges (McGinity, 2015) and more recently, Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs). The first 3 sponsored academies opened in 2002 (Gunter in Gunter, 2012).

Academies were defined as publicly funded schools independent of local authority control (Junemann and Ball, 2013; Gunter in Gunter, 2012; Gunter and McGinity, 2014; Keddie, 2015). The policy initially targeted areas of high social deprivation and was predicated on successful schools or business leaders being given the autonomy to 'take over' neighbouring schools (Beckett in Gunter, 2012; Gunter and McGinity, 2014). To become an academy, the school joined an existing trust, directly funded and accountable to the Department for Education, with additional financial support being provided by the sponsor. Whilst school collaboration was well established in England (Adnett and Davies, 2010; Chapman, 2015) this became formalized through governance with groups of schools becoming a single legal entity (Chapman, 2015; Courtney, 2015; OFSTED, 2019). The DES Education Act (2002) saw an extension to the Learning and Skills Act (2000) which introduced the programme. The Academies Act (2010) then widened the scope to all maintained schools and enabled academy trusts to gain charitable status.

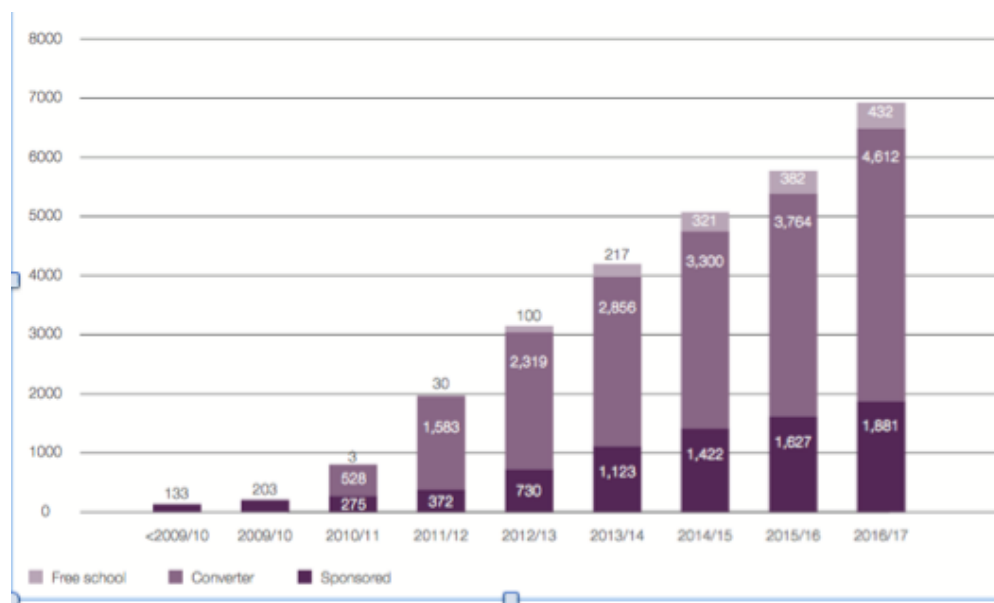
Academies have become an important place to study public policy (Gunter in Gunter, 2012; McGinity, 2015; Olmedo, 2017). Sponsors have been criticised for seeking influence over national and global policy (Junemann and Ball, 2013) as the boundaries between the public and private became blurred (Ball, 2003, 2009; Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002; Junemann and Ball, 2013a; Ball, 2013b; Chapman, 2019). The accountability of sponsors and their influence on curriculum raised further questions (Gunter in Gunter, 2012) together with the role of the local authority (Woods and Simkins, 2014) in educational provision. This was attributed to a breakdown in traditional hierarchies through an experimental (Chapman, 2013) and “controversial” (MacBeath, Galton and Bangs, 2020, p.2) approach where the government role became “both policy development and a delivery arm” (Larsen *et al.*, in Gunter, 2012). Moreover, Annual School Census data 1989 - 2012 and DfE School Performance Tables 2004 – 2012 showed little evidence to support such reform (Gorard, 2014). As the diversity of schools increased (Courtney, 2015), the academies project represented radical change (Woods and Simkins, 2014) where a ‘patchwork’ (McGinity, 2015, p.63) of school types emerged. An example of this was provided in Chapter 2, Table 1.

In terms of provision however, academies enjoyed autonomy concerning curriculum but were required to comply with special educational needs and admissions policies. The policy was initially intended to be limited to a small number of schools. For a school to become sponsored, Andrews *et al.* (2017) described how the Secretary of

State issued an academy order which was recently strengthened under the Education Adoption Act (2016) as the only available option to struggling schools. In a speech given in March 2000, then Education Secretary, David Blunkett (2000, p.1) perpetuated the 'need to increase the diversity of provision in secondary schools, both within schools and between them'. However, Blunkett, simultaneously noted that there was no 'single blueprint for these Academies' seeking sponsorship. Despite sponsored academies and autonomy being seen as a practical solution, NCTL (2014) noted that by 2014, little had changed.

In 2010, academy policy expanded to include schools defined as high performing by OFSTED judgement (Academies Commission, 2013) who demonstrated a record of supporting other schools (Woods and Simkins, 2014) could apply to become Converter Academies.

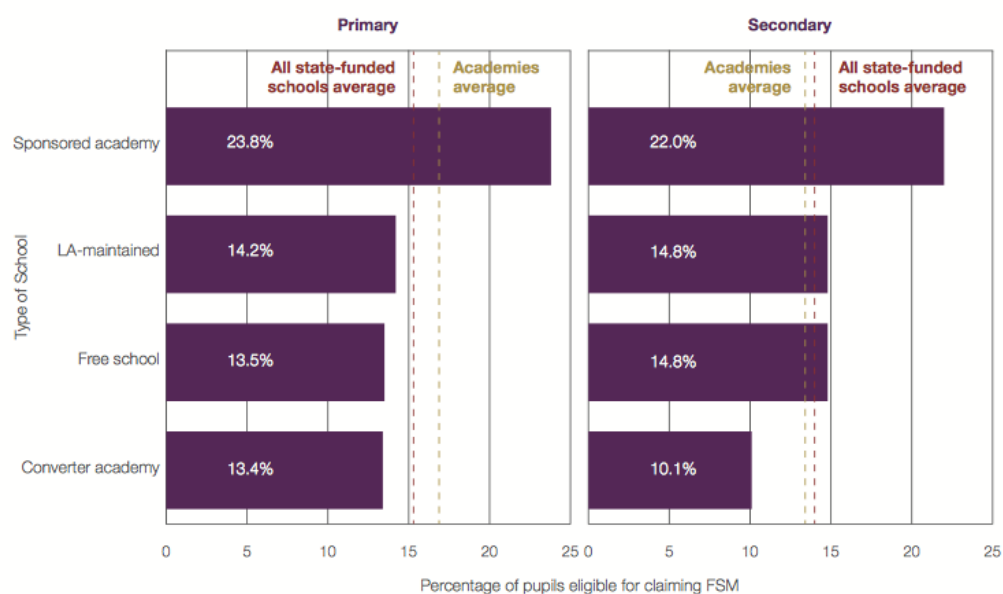
Figure 1: Net total of academies opened (by academy type)



Source: <https://get-information-schools.service.gov.uk> in DfE, 2018a

Figure 1 demonstrated that the academy landscape saw an increase in converter secondary academies. Hutchings and Francis (2018) found there were over 7500 academies in England, whilst the DfE (2018) identified the mean number of schools in a MAT being five and the largest MAT comprising 61 schools. Woods and Simkins (2014) also identified that secondary academies grew at a faster rate than primary academies. Figure 2 concurred with findings that although there was high demand for academy places (Larsen *et al.*, in Gunter, 2012), converter academies educated fewer disadvantaged pupils than sponsored academies (Gorard, 2014).

Figure 2: Percentage of pupils eligible for FSM by school type and stage



Source: Gov.ukb in DfE, 2018a, p.25.

Figure 2 also indicated that at secondary level, there were more than double the number of pupils attending sponsored academies, eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), than at converter academies. Furthermore, in an analysis of GCSE outcomes for academies opened from 2002 – 2005, the proportion of students qualifying for FSM attending reduced by 8% overall (Wrigley in Gunter, 2012). This contradicted the government narrative, that converter academies were well placed to lead schools who were struggling and that the sponsored academy could address historic underachievement in socially disadvantaged areas (National Audit Office, 2010).

Bhattacharya (2013) and Bragg (2014) suggested that this was further undermined by most schools remaining maintained by local authorities. Whilst some argued that this was a 'pragmatic' policy (Caldwell in Gunter, 2012 p.172), others concluded that academies represented neoliberal policy goals of choice and competition (McGinity, 2015) which failed to address the "growing gulf" of inequality between schools (MacBeath *et al.*, 2007, p.43).

Finally, policy was increasingly influenced by Charter Schools in the United States and Sweden's Kunskappsskolan (Knowledge Schools). Correspondingly to MATs in England, they were independent, publicly funded schools with some organisations actively recruiting students in areas of high disadvantage (Caldwell in Gunter, 2012; Chapman, 2013). They enjoyed a high degree of autonomy in student intake, curriculum, and organisation (Goldring and Mavrogordato in Gunter, 2012) in the belief this would raise standards (McGinity, 2015). Similarly to MATs in England however, evidence of impact on student outcomes is mixed (Chapman, 2013). That is, while there were some examples of success, such as in New York and Chicago (Caldwell in Gunter, 2012) in other states, the reverse occurred (Goldring and Mavrogordato in Gunter, 2012). Moreover, despite such schools being presented as increasing choice for parents, in the case of Charter Schools they only served 5% of school-age children in America, thus limiting their overall contribution (William, 2016). However, they remain of interest to both the UK government and leaders of MATs. As such, interviews and documentary analysis will consider whether practices

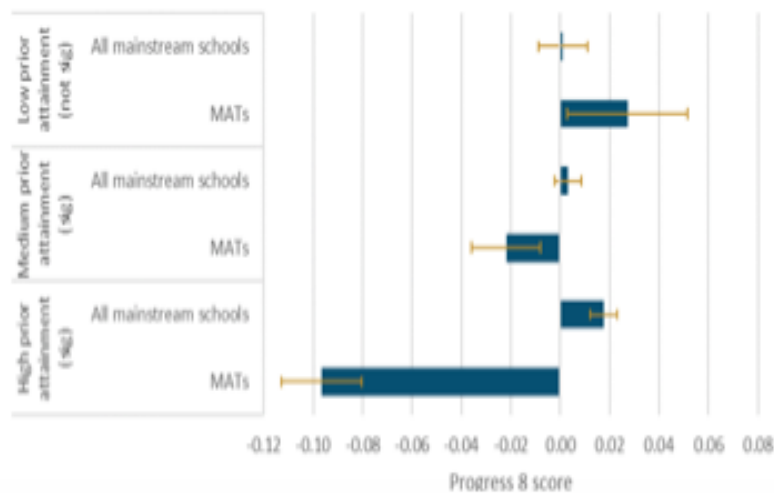
adopted in these contexts have had any influence in the MAT as it is 'imperative' to understand the practices of these contexts (Goldring and Mavrogordato in Gunter, 2012, p.196) which exist as parallel systems (Chapman, 2013).

5.3 Multi-Academy Schools in Practice

In practice, government expanded MATs in the belief that becoming a sponsored academy could secure improvement in outcomes for students (Gorard, 2014). However, when comparing vocational outcomes, pursued to increase attainment, with GCSEs in English and Maths, outcomes data suggested this was not the case (Larsen *et al.*, in Gunter, 2012; Wrigley in Gunter, 2012) with progress more likely indicating amendments in examination policy than school improvement. More widely, government data (Gov.uka, 2018) showed that 31% of MATs secured above or well above average outcomes for their students with 41% remaining below average. This data however, only represented 13% of the whole cohort of a single year of GCSE entry.

In addition, the graph below indicated significant gaps in achievement between groups of students. Here, in 2018 higher attaining students typically underperformed in terms of Progress 8 scores, whilst lower attaining students significantly outperformed students in state-funded mainstream schools.

Figure 3: Progress scores in MATs at Key Stage 4 compared with national average, by prior attainment group (England, 2018)



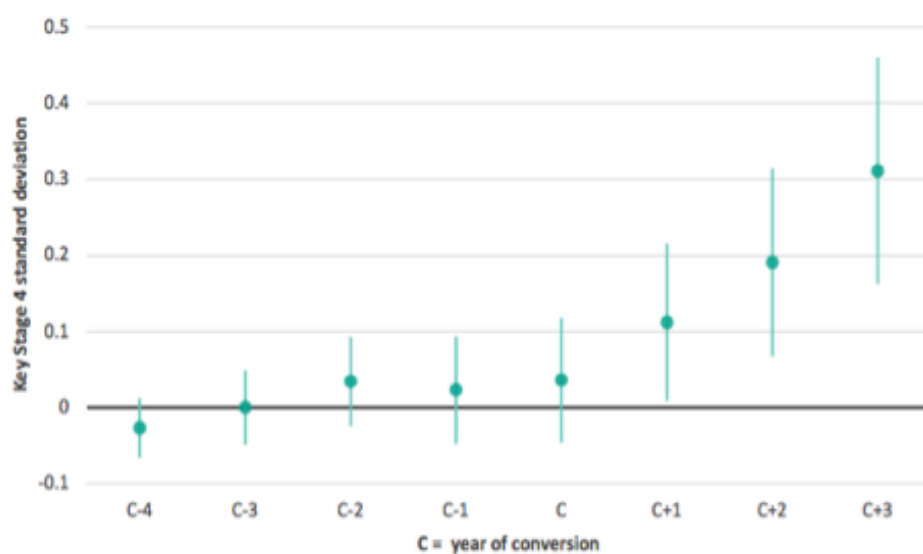
Taken from: DfE, 2019a

Others found significant variation in performance and aspects of the schools which had improved, despite ostensibly similar student intakes (Larsen *et al.*, in Gunter, 2012; Greany and McGinity, 2021).

Debate (Gorard, 2014; Andrews *et al.*, 2017; Eyles *et al.*, 2017) also focused on the time it took for sponsored academies to make an impact on student outcomes. Heifetz (1994) stated that policymakers sought rapid turnaround, yet speed might not always be appropriate. Chapman, Mujis and MacAllister (2011) concluded that improvement took a minimum of two years and later, two to four years to show in student results (Chapman, 2019). Andrews *et al.* (2017) also used student outcome data from pre-2010 sponsored academies to examine the impact of academies on

student outcomes. Figure 4 indicated that when students attended the sponsored academies in the group for longer, on average, there was greater improvement in GCSE outcomes.

Figure 4: The impact of pre-2010 sponsored academies on student outcomes at Key Stage 4:
4:



Taken from Andrews, J. *et al.*, 2017.

Moreover, Hutching and Francis (2017; 2018, p.5) agreed with Eyles *et al.* (2017) finding that 'a minority have steadily improved their performance' whilst Gorard (2014, p.278) found that there is 'no evidence that types of school are differentially effective, and this includes Academies'. Bernardinelli *et al.* (2018) concluded that students in large MATs (of 16+ schools) underperformed in comparison to

standalone academies and maintained schools. These examples challenged the justification at policy level for the investment in the academy programme (Wrigley in Gunter, 2012). Additionally, Greany (2018) and OFSTED (2019) stated that where evidence existed, it was focused on the impact of academies on student outcomes rather than using qualitative methods to understand how trust leaders worked. Despite these assertions, academies have survived several changes in government (Chapman, 2015) with chains increasing rapidly (Chapman, 2013).

Research also established that the challenges experienced in schools facing challenging circumstances discussed in Chapter 4, persisted in sponsored academies. In a review of 27 academies, Greany and McGinity (2021) found that they also suffered challenges in retention with 11 schools experiencing changes in leadership in the first 12 months, inexperienced middle management, and inconsistent teaching. The impact of this was that the transfer of knowledge within the MAT was extremely limited. This further contradicted the policy narrative concerning the need for expansion of academies policy.

However, Coe (2009) found that changing perspective and appearance was more achievable in the short term and could raise confidence among students (Larsen *et al.*, in Gunter, 2012). Gorard (2014, p.269) affirmed that aspects of change were more commonly visible: schools being 're-badged and often re-built, with new names, new governance and management, relaxation of national curriculum requirements,

and part-funded by sponsors.’ Student outcome data though showed that the original purpose of the academies policy took time to be realised in practice and therefore, improvement was not guaranteed.

OFSTED (2016) and Greany (2018) indicated that clear visions, effective performance monitoring and strong use of formative assessment were effective. However, Mongon and Chapman (2011) noted that these factors were not distinctive of a MAT. Hill *et al.* (2012, p.68) stated that this illustrated in practice, Blunkett’s view at academy policy inception that: ‘It is not simply a question of saying: ‘This is the model: follow it’ – it is much more complex and subtle than that’. Whilst Chapman (2015) later pointed out that those attempting to lead struggling schools were not only challenged by the situation, they were also limited in access to research evidence to guide them.

Moreover, literature (Hill *et al.*, 2012; Salokangas and Chapman, 2014; Andrews *et al.*, 2017; Hutchings and Francis, 2017; Papanastasiou, 2017; Greany, 2018; OFSTED, 2019) showed that little was known about practice or how the MAT influenced its schools. The House of Commons Education Select Committee Seventh Report (2017a) sought to explore why seven selected trusts were successful. In earlier evidence (House of Commons, 2016, p.29), it was noted that ‘we were struggling to find them’. As such, House of Commons noted (2017a, p. 29): that ‘Government should commission and publish independent, robust research on what the highest

performing MATs are doing'. Furthermore, Hill *et al.* (2012), OFSTED (2016) and Greany (2018) all identified that little was known about the distinctive features of MATS claimed to be successful.

Levels of autonomy in practice have also been explored. Literature (Salokangas and Chapman, 2014; Andrews *et al.*, 2017; Greany, 2018; OFSTED, 2019) identified this varied between chains and between schools within the same MAT. Salokangas and Chapman (2014) and OFSTED (2019) both used case studies which combined semi-structured interview with documentary analysis. They each identified different arrangements for governance. Greany and McGinity (2021) undertook case studies of 23 MATs. They identified that prescriptive approaches were more likely to be evident in sponsored academies and in the case of one MAT, supported sustainable improvement as they were less dependent on individuals. Whilst Hill *et al.* (2012) indicated that smaller chains appeared to have more diverse arrangements where principals featured more in the leadership structures. Hill *et al.* (2012, p.66) also noted that in practice, there was a lack of detail concerning what the distinctive features of a sponsored academy were when compared to converter chains with 'strategies hav[ing] much in common with those deployed by NLEs and leaders of performance federations'.

More recently, research emerged seeking to understand how MATs operated. OFSTED (2019) identified that where operational support was centralised,

economies of scale benefited schools and leaders were more able to focus on instructional leadership. On the other hand, OFSTED (2019) also stated that where coaching and training opportunities were shared, there were instances where the relationships between schools not in the MAT were stronger than those schools within the MAT, limiting their impact.

Greany (2018) also recognised the importance of MATs having a central team to support their underperforming schools. However, Greany and McGinity, 2021 also found that in most cases, very few had a MAT-wide approach to school improvement. Furthermore, Greany (2018) identified that where lead academies might codify processes to share with others, this could equally be negatively received as an over-simplification of complex approaches (Greany and McGinity, 2021). In addition, both OFSTED (2019) and Greany (2018) noted that assessments were commonly shared between MAT schools in the hope of gauging some sense of overall student performance across the MAT. Yet conversely, greater autonomy in terms of pedagogy, behaviour policies and curricula led to less sharing of good practice. This suggested that academy chains were not 'a panacea' for school improvement (Andrews *et al.*, 2017, p.7).

A summary of key ideas follows:

Table 8: Summary of key ideas arising in Multi-Academy Trusts

Key ideas that inform the research design:
<p>School Collaboration Theory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public policy was increasingly interested in collaborative approaches – but formal collaboration was a recent phenomenon. Formalised governance represents the most recent change in collaborative arrangements. <p>Multi-Academy Policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current research on the impact of the MAT policy was dominated by comparison with student outcomes rather than how leaders work Academy Policy has survived several changes in government There was no single approach for academies. This has not changed over time. The number of Converter academies rose at a faster rate than sponsored academies. <p>Multi-Academy Schools in Practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academy programme has expanded in the belief that they improve student outcomes Rapid turnaround is sought but impact on attainment takes time to achieve Where improvement can be seen, less is known about the actions taken to do this. Aspects of change that are visible have included new names, décor, and governance. Little is known about the daily practice of MATs or indeed the distinctive features of MATs who are claimed to be successful.

5.4 Emerging Conclusions

Key themes that emerged from the literature review were a commonality in the absence of a singular approach to guide the leader of a struggling school. Furthermore, successive governments adopted a structural approach in their pursuit of school improvement through centralized programmes such as the MAT

movement. Though it was claimed that some sponsored academies were starting to contribute towards improved outcomes for students, the dominance of converter academies suggested that the original government policy had not been realized in practice. Whilst autonomy was recognized as a key lever in improving organizations, the use of high stakes accountability practices, together with the persistence of in-school variation presented challenges to policy.

Encouraging a culture of shared leadership through teacher learning communities or coaching had the potential to improve the situations of schools. However, leaders were challenged through their time being stretched and knowing how to help a teacher to improve. Moreover, those leading organisations were slow to show what excellent teaching looked like, as well as creating the conditions to help teachers to improve. Furthermore, despite extensive knowledge of leadership models, schools struggled to recruit and retain teachers. Literature (Andrews *et al.*, 2017; Hutchings and Francis, 2017; Hutchings and Francis, 2018) also found that there was a lack of evidence detailing how MATs brought about improvement, particularly in disadvantaged communities. By extension, there were few representations in literature of the voices of those carrying out the work in the sponsored academy in England.

5.5 Review of Provisional Research Questions

Considering literature which considered leaders' roles, style and focus, together with the notion of a struggling school and multi-academy trusts, a refined title emerged:

'Creating new from old: exploring the lived experiences of leaders implementing change within sponsored academies in England.'

The focus of research being an investigation into how secondary school leaders carried out their roles and perceived the role of the trust in supporting their daily work. It was intended to give an insight into the experiences of senior leaders working in what might traditionally have been known as a school in challenging circumstances. The provisional research questions were also refined and are identified in the opening of Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6: RESEARCH DESIGN

6.1 Introduction

The following chapter outlines the philosophical and methodological considerations guiding the research questions. The ontological orientation and epistemological assumptions and the rationale for a case study approach in relation to the purpose of the study is considered. This provides the basis for a discussion of my own position within the work and the methods that were used to gather data. The chapter concludes with a discussion of validity, reliability and ethical considerations.

6.2 Research Aim and Questions

The aim of the research was to further contribute towards existing understandings of the leadership of MATs and in particular, sponsored academies. The research sought to gather the accounts of school and MAT leaders in roles parallel to school leaders to consider in depth their roles, focus and practice, evidenced through interviews and documents.

To achieve the aim, the research questions defining the project were:

1. How did the leaders in the sponsored academies perceive and enact their roles in school improvement?
2. How did leaders from the MAT perceive and enact their roles in school improvement in sponsored academies?
3. How did the roles of the school leader and the leader(s) from the MAT interact in relation to school improvement in the MAT?
4. What can be learned about the leadership of school improvement from the common and varying experiences of leaders across the MAT in this context?

The questions lent themselves to researching the perceptions of individuals, as the thesis was interested in generating understandings of the experiences of secondary school senior leaders. The ways in which school leaders experienced their situations depended on their own conceptions of their schools, the MAT and the whole process of schooling in society. Others might have interpreted these situations in different ways. The thesis sought to develop practical insights into the actions undertaken by leaders in sponsored academies in a MAT environment.

6.3 Research paradigm

This section describes a set of conceptual tools stemming from interpretivist ontological and epistemological assumptions, used to frame and develop the research. These tools were used to 'map' this exploration of school leaders'

experiences of the sponsored academy setting (Biesta, 2020). The research questions sought insights that were likely to be subjective, influenced by context and focused on how these leaders perceived their experiences. As such, I was not concerned with whether a 'real world' existed nor how to separate interpretation from reality. Instead, as Baghramian (2004) described, I was interested in exploring how school leaders in the context of the MAT, interpreted their world. Moreover, I was not neutral to the object of study or indeed, the participants. This could provide an authentic and shared account but also raises questions concerning my own positionality. The research focussed on school and MAT leaders' lived experiences of implementing change in four academies in a large MAT in England. As such, the leadership of the multi-academy trust sponsored academy context, was considered in relation to other contexts (Charmaz, 2006; 2014; Baghramian, 2015) such as school leadership, school improvement and wider MAT approaches.

Through being interested in people's everyday experiences (Biesta, 2020), the study sought subjectivity. In their exploration of how underlying philosophical assumptions influenced ethical approaches, Lincoln and Guba (1989) rejected the language used to identify research participants. Traditional, positivist terms such as 'subjects' were no longer required as they limited the opportunity for openness between the researcher and participant. Baghramian (2015) explained that meaning was constructed through experience that was personal in nature. It was closely linked to the culture, belief system or make-up of people whilst valuing the

contribution that people's stories could make to our understanding of the world. Participants contributing to the research may have belonged to a community in their own school and other communities in the MAT. They were likely to hold diverse experiences with potentially an abundance of perspectives, allowing for multiple truths to exist. In literature (Stoll *et al.*, in Reynolds *et al.*, 1996; Chapman, 2004; DeRue and Ashford, 2010; Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2019; Chapman, 2019), context was significant when considering school improvement. As such, the research questions were concerned with how participants perceived their contexts.

Furthermore, Grbich (2013) and Thomas (2013) explained how epistemology helped to explain the findings and identify what could be known in this aspect of the social world. Influenced by the belief that there could be more than one truth, the nature of the research questions embraced subjectivity. They allowed for an exploration of the richness of the human experience in the context of school leaders working within individual sponsored academies. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) elaborated further and added that interpretivist approaches described and explained human behaviour led by research participants. Seeking understanding of those engaged in school improvement and particularly, the sponsored academy context in MATs was the key focus for this study. By nature, these considered the richness and complexity of experience and the significance of context.

6.4 Rationale for a Case Study Approach

To consider leaders' perspectives within their contexts, a case study approach was taken. Case study research was associated with problem solving and generating distinct connections and interpretations of phenomena and is particularly relevant to school improvement research (Bollen in Reynolds *et al.*, 1996). Literature (Yin, 2003; Flyvbjerg, 2001; Thomas, 2013; Thomas and Myers, 2015; Candappa 2017) explained that the purpose was to generate understandings from data collected and enabled a subject to be explored from different angles. In this case, leadership of a large, single MAT in England.

However, case study research was complex. It reflected the idea that our world is one that is messy and difficult to access. Both Gilgun (2014) and Thomas (2015) however, described how case studies could help to make sense of situations through getting close to the case to explore multiple facets in depth. Thomas (2013, p.591) stated that they provide the opportunity to explore the 'richness of the living worlds.' Moreover, research (Greany, 2018, Salokangas and Ainscow, 2018; OFSTED, 2019) used case studies which concluded these were increasingly seen as both helpful and challenging in the field of educational research. They provided a means of gaining insight into subjects that may not ordinarily be accessible through more other methods such as surveys. As such, literature (Yin, 2003; Flyvbjerg, 2001; Candappa, 2013; Thomas, 2013) suggested that a case study approach helped to consider the

interpretations of 'how' and 'why' questions, in relation to school improvement in sponsored academies in a MAT to generate understandings.

Through being interested in questions exploring the 'how' and 'why' of situations, the case study was concerned with people and their perspectives. A case study provided more of an approach than a framework, where individual perspectives were likely to be different. This, Thomas (2016) found, made it difficult to define. Gilgun (2014) also identified that in paying attention to context, the case study provided the opportunity to explore issues that were complex and difficult to name. On the other hand, the personal nature of this approach arguably supported authentic, ecologically valid accounts (Priestley, Biesta, Robinson, 2015) of how school and MAT leaders individually and collaboratively led in their contexts to support shared sense making. To support participants in practice, Ragin (1992) noted the importance of place and organizational factors such as ensuring privacy and anonymity to support participants, whilst Candappa (2017) and Thomas (2016) both identified the need for boundaries using time. This was also important as I was researching from an insider perspective which had to be addressed both in preliminary information and at the start of interviews.

The single case study approach has though, faced criticism. When encountering challenging or complex situations, we seek a solution, which has ideally been simplified or distilled which give us comfort through an implied credibility. However,

Flyvbjerg (2006) and Gilgun (2014) both explained that the case study was not intended to enable generalization or make comparison and as such, historically, lacked credibility. Literature (Yin, 2003; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Thomas, 2013; Thomas, 2016; Candappa, 2017) however, agreed that the case study did not seek this. On the other hand, understandings made visible in this study, could potentially be theoretically generalisable (Yin, 2018). That is, the practical nature (Priestley, Biesta, Robinson, 2015) of this study could be relevant beyond this case, to explore other school leaders' experiences of working in similar roles and contexts, seeking to address similar challenges. More generalisable examples might include an interest in collaboration or the use of agreed approaches to the leadership of curriculum subjects.

In the context of this individual study whilst a multi-case study could produce a wider range of experiences or several examples of a complex thing, the single case study could reveal details that might not ordinarily surface. Gilgun (2014) noted that evidence collected was narrative in style: uncorroborated, anecdotal, contextually driven, and reflective. From here, rich data could be generated and in turn, might support school or MAT leaders through the provision of practical examples.

In practice, it was clear from participant responses that they were sharing personal understandings of their professional contexts. Some were open and engaging, others were more reserved and so reassurance of confidentiality was essential.

Thomas (2016, p.7) stated that the case study, unlike its more measurable counterparts, sought to explore 'every nook and cranny'. This could uncover what Thomas (2015) described as the intricacies of personal and professional experience. However, the study was not striving to quantify what school improvement looked like. Instead, it was seeking to hear the voices that as Chapter 2 suggested, were not routinely heard. Gilgun (2014) also noted that the language associated with the case study method was rich, deep, and focused on personal experience. It attempted to understand the picture in more than one dimension which was appropriate to the overall purpose of the study and the underlying philosophical approach.

6.5 The Case

The research involved a local knowledge (Thomas, 2013) case study, consisting of a group of sponsored academies and leaders nested in a single MAT. The MAT operated on a national level and comprised of a range of types of school. As discussed in Chapter 2, it was one of the largest MATs in England. In the trust, there were free schools, sponsored and converter academies, at both primary and secondary level, spread over three contrasting geographical locations in England. A free school was a school funded by the government but not run through local councils. Free schools were associated with being set up by charities, universities, parents and community groups to fulfil a perceived gap in educational provision

within a community. A converter academy on the other hand, was a publicly funded independent school, deemed to be successful by the schools' inspectorate. Over time, the converter academy might form a MAT to lead schools in need of improvement. A sponsored academy contrasted with a converter academy because it typically had a history of underperformance. The schools explored in this case were all sponsored academies in the MAT. These were most closely aligned to the concept of the struggling school context explored in Chapter 4.

The House of Commons (2017b) stated that by March 2016 there were 973 MATs in the UK, with 828 (85%) of these comprising between 1 and 5 academies. This resulted in 1 in 5 (22%) of pupils being taught within a MAT, and by 2016, there were only 10 MATs (1%) that were made up of 30 or more schools. The case study that was the focus of the research was in the 1% of MATs made up of more than 30 schools.

6.6 Units of analysis

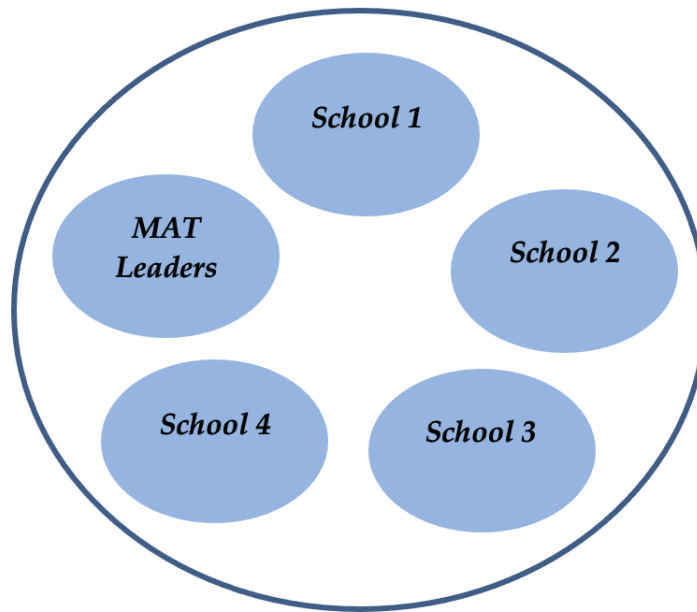
In the case study, there were five embedded units of analysis (Yin, 2003) or nests (Thomas, 2016). These comprised of 5 groups: leaders from 4 secondary sponsored academies and 1 group of MAT leaders. Nesting enabled exploration of several perspectives through semi-structured interviews and related documentation written by or about the MAT. School leaders were grouped by school rather than by role as

each school context differed. This also enabled discussion of how roles linked, or contrasted, within and between schools and supported the wider philosophical approach and research design. Documents and interviews with school and MAT leaders were included in the exploration of each nest. Further analysis across 2 interview phases and documentary analysis was then undertaken. Adopting a nest and then a 'cross phase' approach enabled constant comparison (Thomas, 2016) of ideas throughout the analysis.

To explore the role of the MAT leader, academy representatives were grouped together. Interview data suggested they identified as a group who were part of the MAT, being both separate to schools and closely linked to them. They worked with individual leaders in sponsored academies and delivered strategic support and training across the MAT. Hierarchically, these leaders' roles were parallel to senior leadership teams of a secondary school illustrated in Figure 5.

Using Thomas (2013), the reason these groups were not identified as multiple case studies was because the units for analysis belonged to a single MAT bound by a single set of common values.

Figure 5: The Case: leadership of the MAT



6.7 Positionality

I was an insider. I was a senior leader working in a sponsored academy which was part of the MAT that formed the focus of the study. I interviewed leaders and selected documents related to those who were employed at the MAT at the time of academisation and those that were not, along with leaders working in other MAT secondary sponsored academies. The study was interested in exploring what Freebody (2003, p.45) described as the 'mundane, thoroughly recognizable but unremarked daily practices', to consider whether the ways leaders in the MAT worked were interesting and potentially useful.

Advantages of being an insider included working in the organisation. Savvides *et al.* (2004), Mercer (2007) and Cormier (2017) identified that this supported the use of a

common language and experience with participants. The research questions focused on the experiences of leaders in the secondary sponsored academy context because I was part of the community studied. Cormier (2017) cited that access to a range of participants could be more readily available, which might give the opportunity for rich data to be collected. Indeed, during the interview process, some participants identified that the opportunity to reflect upon their own journeys was a positive aspect of being involved in the research.

Whilst the position of an insider had advantages, there were also potential issues. An insider enjoyed increased credibility and rapport with participants through, in some examples, previously established relationships. However, reassurance of anonymity in the interview context mattered, particularly as interviews were recorded. Savvides *et al.* (2004) reminded that familiarity did not guarantee trust. My changing role, to that of a researcher, provoked increased, though subtle, concerns about trust in two schools with two participants. In others, there was a clear interest in maximizing the opportunity for participants to tell their story.

Another challenge was the reliability of data collected. Biddle (1979) stated that it was important to realise that the conclusions might be different to what another researcher may draw. In practice, whilst similar questions were asked of participants, their stories varied. As such, interviews started with an explanation of my role as a student and motivation for the study. Participants were given an information poster

to clarify the purpose of the study and signed consent forms (Appendices 1 to 4). Framing the work to be undertaken, and explicit consideration of confidentiality in telling their story, was intended to reassure participants. Furthermore, reference to protecting anonymity, an explanation of how data would be stored and the option to withdraw, was shared and included in the written ethical consent form (Appendix 2).

A further risk associated with the insider perspective was that participants might omit details under the assumption that they would be known (Cormier, 2017). In addition, implied meanings, through comment or gesture, would not be inherently realised. This could also, Mercer (2007) and Savvides *et al.* (2004) pointed out, have the effect of not being able to guarantee authentic responses. Cormier (2017) and Mercer (2007) described how interviewer questions might not be probing enough because of being able to interpret context. As such, it might be challenging to retain a critical stance in relation to the data gathered or properly portray the essence of each leader's story. It also became clear through data analysis that key points raised by participants in interviews and documents could be missed in analysis of data. To reduce the risk, participants were asked probing questions to enable them to provide more detail and offered the opportunity to review their transcripts.

Another consideration as an insider was the influence of the researcher in interview. Yin (2018) stated that reflexivity occurred when the interviewee discussed what they

thought the interviewer wanted to hear or the interviewer unknowingly influenced the participant. Mercer (2007) identified the validity of the data collected could be reduced because the potential for distortion was greater. I was not neutral to the participants or the focus of the research. However, strategies used to ensure that participants were not influenced included specific reassurance that they were able to express their own thoughts and feelings freely. Interviews were conducted in a private room at a time convenient to the participants. Throughout the interviews, facial expressions, gestures, and utterances were reduced to avoid unintentionally influencing participants or as literature (Mears, 2017; Robson and McCartan, 2016; Thomas 2013) showed, avoid becoming consumed by the conversation itself and thereby, losing sight of the research purpose. In Chapter 7, the approaches used to gather and analyse the data are considered in further detail.

CHAPTER 7: RESEARCH DESIGN: DATA

7.1 Data Gathering

Chapters 2 to 5 identified that there was no singular approach towards the wider school improvement context, or indeed, more specific approaches that might help leaders in struggling schools. Government responses to this issue often lay in structural solutions such as a nationalized curriculum or the MAT movement. The same was true of approaches to leadership in struggling schools; instructional leadership increasingly appeared to be a style that might positively support student outcomes but over time, interest in leadership practice rather than style evolved. As such, interview questions reflected the practical application of leadership practice and the challenges encountered in the sponsored academy context.

Chapter 6 discussed how a case study methodology enabled multiple perspectives at different moments in time to be considered. Chapter 7 therefore considered how two forms of data were collected to draw out as Thomas (2013) described, the complex ideas and issues faced by individuals in real situations. These were the

semi-structured interview and documentary analysis. This chapter explores these methods, sampling, approach to data analysis and related ethical considerations.

7.2 Semi-structured interview

Thomas (2013) stated that case studies were typically concerned with trying to make connections between others' experiences and our own. Interviews could enable researchers to learn from participants' experiences and everyday language (Gibbs, 2017) to support participant reflection as they described changes made in their schools over time. Mears (2017, p.183) explained that interviews 'produce a deeper understanding and appreciation of the circumstances of people's lives.' As such, insights, rather than broad trends were sought where perspectives, characterized by opinion (Gibbs, 2017) led to questions focused upon events at different points in time. In addition, interviews support depth of understanding (Lincoln and Guba, 1981) to go beyond what can be learned in a group discussion or survey (Mears, 2017). Interviews typically undertaken in a one-to-one setting could provide insights into how and why situations occurred (Yin, 2018) to consider the challenges leaders may have faced in their contexts. Consequently:

- The first phase explored leaders' practices in three key timeframes in the first twelve months of their school improvement journey.

- The second phase focused on asking the same questions used in Phase 1 but also exploring the emergent themes with participants to identify whether these resonated with their experiences. This phase also focused on three key timeframes in the first twelve months of their school improvement journey.

Semi-structured interviews could though, be misconceived as simple and intuitive because they could be said to provide greater potential for spontaneity. Mears (2017) and Thomas (2013) described how interviews provided an opportunity for us to exchange information via a conversation. Interviews explored participants' underlying motives and 'what lies beneath our actions' (Robson and McCartan, 2016, p.256). Through hearing individual voices and stories, emotion and context together with how and why decisions were made, could be probed (Hennick *et al.*, 2011). As such, questions needed to be short and focused (Gibbs, 2017; Mears, 2017). Interview schedules were written to support participants in reflection with a pilot interview prior to starting Phase 1 undertaken. From this, it was apparent that it was important to ask probing questions to gain a deeper insight and remind participants that information would be reported anonymously.

Establishing trust in the short time span of the interview was considered. Whilst difficulties concerning access to participants was not a challenge, an emphasis on the fact that what they said would be treated in confidence needed explicit reassurance. In some cases, participants were more eager to share their stories but in other cases, details were omitted. As such, there was a strong link between ethical

practice and the interview situation. Mears (2017) indicated that informed consent, accuracy of recording data shared with participants, together with honest communication helped increase the potential for candour.

Whilst semi-structured interviews helped to explore people's perspectives, they could also be unpredictable in nature, unlike documents (Robson and McCartan, 2016). Biddle (1979) and Robson and McCartan (2016) both noted that the validity of the data collected could also therefore be vulnerable to criticism from those who considered quantitative methods to produce more credible results. To prepare, clarity in relation to the type and purpose of interview was helpful. Thomas (2013) noted that whilst structured interviews might indicate uniformly collected data, unstructured interviews supported a more conversational tone. As a result, a semi-structured approach was chosen. These resembled a more guided discussion (Yin, 2018) and so questions produced, formed a framework for participants (Harding, 2013). Additionally, a fully structured interview, might have created a feeling of a developed questionnaire which could have limited what participants might have wanted to share (Robson and McCartan, 2016).

The questions on the interview schedule (Appendices 3 and 4) were planned to support participant reflection. Derived from the summaries of key ideas in Chapters 3 to 5, interviews explored leaders' motivations, their role, what they focused on, and actions taken to lead change. Individual participants had different perspectives

and experiences with leadership in a sponsored academy in the MAT. Moreover, interviews explored information, which might not ordinarily have surfaced through a more structured questionnaire style. Therefore, having the scope to explore interesting comments needed to be considered in the interview context (Thomas, 2013).

7.3 Documentary Analysis

To enrich the case study, documents were analysed alongside interview data. Literature (McCulloch, 2017; Richards, 2015; Smith, 2017; Thomas, 2013) showed that documentary analysis was an invaluable if under-used technique. Candappa (2017) noted that using documents broadened the range of perspectives and the opportunity to examine the interaction between them. A variety of documents could enable a greater depth of understanding to the case to emerge. As such, options included interview transcripts, accounts of situations and publications. Richards (2015) also identified commonplace items such as newspapers could be featured in analysis. Furthermore, studies (Harding, 2013; McCulloch, 2017; Smith, 2017) stated that policy reports, and submission to topics featured in parliamentary debates could further add to a purposeful analysis.

However, a focused search was required (Yin, 2018). Documents were selected after Phase 1 and then added to, during the Phase 2 interviews, supporting a constant

comparative approach. The documents available for selection were limited. Those chosen were written by people employed by the MAT or outside of the MAT. They explored the work of the MAT leaders and included stories by or about leaders from the MAT. As such, they aligned in nature, with the interpretivist nature of the study. Similarly, to the insider perspective in my own positionality though, this approach could be limiting. This was because they could be said to be limited in viewpoint or perpetuate a selected, internally motivated narrative of school improvement. However, the purpose of using documents was to consider whether what was written by or about the MAT shed light on, or challenged, the perspectives of those interviewed. The records were in the public domain and are noted in Table 9 with selection criteria identified in the top row of the table.

Table 9: Types of documents selected and selection criteria

No.	What type of document is this?	What is the purpose of the document?	From whose perspective was the document written?	Are there any examples included of school leaders' experiences in the MAT?
1	1a. The 'About Us' section from the MAT website.	Inform readers of contextual information about the MAT.	Insider: corporate author.	N
	1b. 'Our Approach' section from the MAT website.			
2	Annual Report 2015 for the MAT.	To summarise events in the MAT during the year 2015.	Insider: corporate author.	Y
3	A blog published on the MAT website (2019)	To explore how curriculum could be created and what the teacher's role was.	Insider: written by employee of the MAT in the role of a trust leader.	Y
4	A blog published on the MAT website (2019)	To explore how employees in the MAT were retained.	Insider: corporate author.	Y
5	An extract from a book on school leadership (2015).	To describe the journey of a single school in the MAT under sponsorship.	Insider: written by a senior leader in a school in the MAT whose role was comparable to the role of a senior leader interviewed. The school was the first to be sponsored in the MAT in 2006.	Y
6	A report commissioned by the MAT (2015).	To reflect on the MAT's work and wider educational context.	Insider edited with contributions from both MAT employees and commissioned writers.	Y
7	A chapter from a book on schools in England. Focus: same school as document 5 (2017).	To explore the work undertaken by one sponsored academy in the MAT.	Outsider: written by a senior leader in a school in a different context. Part of a series of case studies. The chapter explored the first school to be sponsored in the MAT and could be compared to document 5 because they were about the same school.	Y
8	A case study of the MAT (2014)	To articulate how the MAT works to improve schools.	Outsider: a government publication. One case study detailed the journey of the academy in School 1.	Y
9	An article written by 2 MAT Leaders (2019)	To articulate how leaders are using approaches learned from a network of Charter Schools to develop leadership practices of those MAT leaders working across multiple schools in the MAT.	Insider: written by 2 MAT leaders, one of which was associated with leading schools in Schools 1, 3 and 4. The other leader worked at a senior MAT level.	Y

NVIVO was used to analyse the documents in the same way as the interviews. This provided a consistent approach.

Documentary analysis was helpful for several reasons. Smith (2017) identified that secondary data gave access to information on a scale that could not be replicated through interview. Richards (2015) and McCulloch (2017) agreed documents also helped the researcher to be less concerned with generating data and more focused on selecting material that might already exist. Published and readily accessible sources, McCulloch (2017) stated, could deepen understandings. In this context, the work of school leaders in the sponsored academy was the focus.

Another consideration in the selection of documents lay in understanding the position and perspective of the document writers and participants featured. Literature (Harding, 2013; McCulloch, 2017; Smith, 2017; Yin, 2018) agreed that it was important to consider what they might have been seeking to achieve in their writings and the period in which the documents were written. This was also pertinent because many documents existed before the study evolved. The writers then had a different purpose. They would be unaware that their work was an anonymous source in the study. On the other hand, Braun and Clarke (2013) and Richards (2015) both suggested that documentary analysis could be an unobtrusive data collection method.

An additional issue to consider was validity. Yin (2018) identified that validity issues could occur through my own bias in the selection of documents, as discussed earlier in this section and in relation to the potential audience at the time of writing by the original author. Moreover, Harding, (2013) noted that documents, unlike semi-structured interviews, were not interactive and could present the desired approaches rather than practice (Spillane *et al.*, 2001). There was also no opportunity to question or clarify meaning from the writer. Furthermore, with the increase in access afforded via online searches, ethical concerns arose in respect of what constituted writing for personal use and public use. Even though the material was online, it needed to be represented anonymously to protect the writer of the document and more widely, the identity of the MAT. Specific references taken from each text were therefore checked to preserve the anonymity of the writers, leaders and more widely, the MAT.

7.4 Population and Sample

Theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2014) associated with Grounded Theory was used to select the participants to be interviewed. A two-phase approach enabled initial codes to be generated and further data to be collected as codes emerged. This study excluded the newly opened free schools in the MAT as well as primary schools. This was because the struggling school context and the role of several layers of school leaders collaborating in secondary level school improvement within the same space,

in complementary roles was the focus of the study. At the time, there were twelve sponsored secondary academies in the MAT. Sampling leadership in four sponsored secondary academies represented one third of those in the MAT. The MAT's own website and OFSTED Reports provided contextual information concerning the type of school to explore. The context of each nest and therefore, reason for inclusion in this study, is provided in the introduction to each section in Chapter 8.

Participants for interview were:

Phase 1: 1 leader from the MAT; 5 sponsored academy leaders

Phase 2: 3 leaders from the MAT; 5 sponsored academy leaders.

For Phase 2, the number of leaders from the MAT was increased because it became clear that from the perspective of the school leader, MAT leaders were significant in supporting their work in school improvement. This also enabled exploration of how the school leader and MAT leaders' roles might interact to answer Research Question 3.

After the pilot interview, in total, 14 leaders were interviewed. 2 of the 14 leaders were part of the predecessor school. All other leaders joined their school at the point of the school joining the MAT, or they had worked elsewhere in the MAT, or took up post soon after the school became a MAT sponsored academy. I wondered whether the concept Bauman (2008) described as a loose-knit community, was

present in participants' experiences, and whether their roles enabled them to move freely. This was further explored in Phase 2 and the documents. The idea was reflected in Table 10. This detailed the role of those leaders interviewed and whether they had held previous roles in the MAT.

Table 10: Interview Participants by role and phase:

The Case	Phase	Participant (by order of interview)	Role situated in	The School Leader Gad also held a leadership role in a MAT or school role:	This role linked to:
Leadership of a single MAT in England	Phase 1	MAT Leader A	MAT Leaders		
		School Leader A	School 2	MAT	MAT Leaders, Schools 1 and 4
		School Leader B	School 2	School	School in the MAT, not part of the study
		School Leader C	School 2		
		School Leader D	School 3		
		School Leader E	School 1		
	Phase 2	School Leader F	School 4		
		School Leader G	School 3	School	School 4
		School Leader H	School 4	School	School 1
		MAT Leader B	MAT Leaders		
		MAT Leader C	MAT Leaders		
		School Leader I	School 4		
		School Leader J	School 4	School	School 1
		MAT Leader D	MAT Leaders	School	School 1

Table 10 showed there was variation in the number of participants interviewed. This was because the idea that leaders were not necessarily limited in practice by the implied boundary of their school or role. MAT Leaders A and C, for example, had supported several school leaders in the MAT. Their perspectives spanned a greater range of schools than expected. Additionally, School Leader G was seconded from one school to another and drew comparisons between the two. They concurred with

Fullan (2001, p.31; 2019) who cited the messiness of leading change in schools and Weiss (1995) who identified with the complexity associated with effecting change in communities.

Documents which included case study examples of the journeys of leaders within the MAT at the time of turnaround, or later articulation of this, were included. As such, some leaders could be linked to the schools illustrated in Table 11 and further supported theoretical perspectives explored in Chapter 2 concerned with the complexity associated with the leadership of change. This also fitted with Gilgun (2014) who stated in the context of case study literature, that our world is difficult to access. Tables 11 and 12 therefore clarified how the roles of leaders from the MAT were explored from different angles through interview and documents. As case study literature (Yin, 2003; Flyvbjerg, 2001; Thomas, 2013; Thomas, 2015; Candappa 2017) identified, these were intended to generate understandings.

Table 11: Leaders included in Documents:

No.	Type of Document	Additional Participant through their inclusion in the Document	Reason for Inclusion
1	1a. The 'About Us' section from the MAT website	N/A	N/A
2	1b. The 'Our Approach' section from the MAT website	N/A	N/A
2	The Annual Report 2015 for the MAT	School Leader	Worked at School 1 when this document was published and was more recently, an executive

			leader in MAT Leaders with a wider role across schools 1, 3 and 4.
		School Leader	Referenced by School Leader 2 in case study at School 1 but no longer working at the MAT.
3	A blog published on the MAT website	MAT Leader	Written by a leader whose role could sit within MAT Leaders.
4	A blog published on the MAT website	School Leader	The leader featured in this blog was interviewed in Phase 1, School 2.
5	An extract from a book	School Leader	This leader led the first sponsored academy in the MAT but no longer worked at the MAT.
6	A report commissioned by the MAT	School Leader	Additional Sponsored Academy
		MAT Executive Leader	Added contextual detail: content potentially mirrored or contrasted with interview and other documentary data.
		Charter School Leader who has worked with the MAT	
7	A chapter from a book on schools in England. Focus: same school as document 5	School Leader	The author focused on the work of the leader in Document 5.
8	A case study of the MAT	School Leader	The author wrote a case study on the work of a school leader in School 1. This was one of the leaders featured in Document 2.
9	An article written by 2 MAT Leaders	MAT Executive Leader and MAT Senior Leader	One of the authors of this document was a school leader in School 1 and featured in Document 8. This leader's role has evolved into one leading the schools in Schools 1, 3 and 4. The content of the article also could add to data concerning how the MAT might be influenced by Charter Schools.

The inclusion of the leaders increased the stories in this case study from 14 to 19 perspectives. Of the additional views represented through the documents, 4 leaders remained employees of the MAT at the time of writing. This, together with the crossover in roles detailed in Table 10, raised a potentially interesting area to reflect on; that of how the MAT retained and developed its' leaders. This was interesting because literature (Kutash *et al.*, 2010; Clegg *et al.*, 2017; Leckie and Goldstein, 2018;

OECD, 2019) indicated that schools struggled to recruit and retain teachers and leaders. Furthermore, the sample represented two contexts of MAT leader working in sponsored academies:

- MAT Leaders A and C held roles which supported all sponsored academies in the MAT.
- MAT Leaders B and D were based in one of the three regional centres operated by the MAT.

All MAT leaders interviewed had supported in 1 or more of the sponsored academies as part of their role. These were detailed in Table 12:

Table 12: Sponsored academies supported by MAT leaders

		Trust Leaders had supported academy leaders in:			
		School 1	School 2	Schools 3	School 4
MAT Leaders	MAT Leader A	✓	✓		✓
	MAT Leader B	✓		✓	✓
	MAT Leader C	✓	✓	✓	✓
	MAT Leader D	✓		✓	✓

Interviewing leaders in both roles enabled comparison between what school leaders and MAT leaders said. It also supported maintaining a focus on practical school-based support rather than other elements of a MAT such as human resources or

finance. From here, it was possible to explore the gap in knowledge identified in Chapter 2 in terms of the voices of school leaders' daily roles being insufficiently represented. In turn, this then contributed to data to answer Research Question 3 concerning the ways in which MAT and school leaders interacted.

7.5 Data Analysis

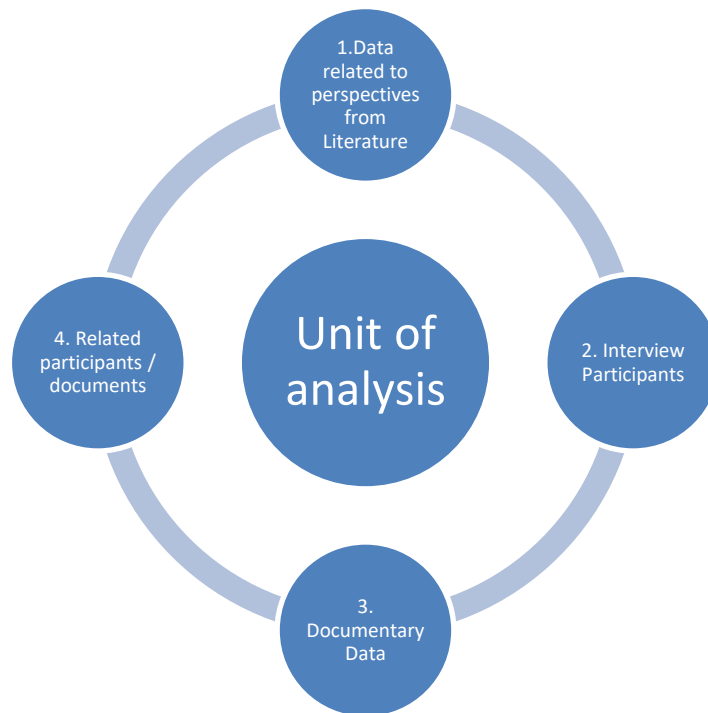
Charmaz (2014) stated that participants' data could be analysed to theorize from their experiences. This supported the wider philosophical approach which literature (Gilgun, 2014; Charmaz, 2014; Thornberg and Charmaz, 2014) suggested sought to explore participants' experiences from different angles. Here, Charmaz and Keller (2016, p.9) identified, researchers 'are not so concerned with absolute accuracy; theoretical plausibility is much more important in most areas.' The ways in which participants experienced their situations depended on their own perceptions of their schools and the ways in which they acted. Charmaz (2014) and Gilgun (2014) noted that how they described these situations reflected the way they perceived their contexts. Furthermore, the use of nesting within a single case study enabled a range of perspectives to be explored in-depth to create a holistic account of the leadership of change within the sponsored academy context.

As an insider, I was part of the social realities that participants explained through interview and documentary contributions (Charmaz, 2014; Thornberg and Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (2014) showed, researchers could not claim to 'park' pre-existing knowledge. Through this, theories were not discovered but instead, constructed through past and present involvements and interactions with people and practice. Kelle (2014, p.11) then suggested that purposeful analysis could focus on the 'transfer [of] middle-range concepts to new research domains.' Research (Thomas, 2013; Charmaz, 2014; Kelle, 2014) showed that constant comparison between data, analysis and literature could enable learning to be more about the worlds and the people studied and support credibility. As such, the data was coded in three ways; by nests and then 2 phases and documents combined. This supported a constant comparative approach by following up interesting ideas (Thomas, 2016) between phases to give a richer picture of their experiences of leading in the MAT.

Secondly, where relevant, interview and documentary data by individual school and MAT leader was combined. Literature (Hill *et al.*, 2012; Salokangas and Chapman, 2014; Andrews *et al.*, 2017; Hutchings and Francis, 2017; Papanastasiou, 2017; Greany, 2018; OFSTED, 2019) showed that how the MAT influences its schools remained unknown. This suggested that it was still important to explore the experiences of leaders in individual schools. As such, six sets of analysis were produced overall. These were designated as MAT Leaders and Schools 1 to 4 in Chapter 8. Figure 6 illustrates each data analysis section that follows opened with as

illustrated summary of key elements. In Chapter 9, all phase 1 and 2 data sets were combined with documentary data and related to further theoretical perspectives to deduce overall findings to answer the research questions in Chapter 10. The interaction of the data with literature for each unit of analysis is illustrated in Figure 6:

Figure 6: Approach to data analysis and discussion:



Literature featured in all analyses. Variance occurred in the inclusion of points 2, 3 and 4 in Figure 6. Because over-lap emerged between leaders' stories from different schools, roles or documents, circle 4 where relevant, identified additional leaders or documents. Data contributed to a wider emergent picture of the importance of what

Bauman (2008) described as loose-knit communities in the experiences of leaders in the MAT in relation to Research Question 4.

To support coding of the data, NVIVO software was used. Frieze (2019) stated that using software for data analysis was less typically associated with constant comparative approaches. However, both Frieze (2019) and Gorra (2019) agreed that software helped to structure and make sense of the analysis and to re-read codes selected, simultaneously across the data. Emergent patterns, particularly around actions and experiences could also be searched for (Frieze, 2019). In the study, searches included leaders having 'tools' or 'models' to use and how the MAT leader perceived their relationship with school leaders, which was helpful because participants mentioned different points as they recalled varied situations. Software could lead to data being read out of context. To alleviate the issue, data was compared continually, original audio files were repeatedly listened to and as Charmaz (2014) identified, preliminary notes as memos (Figure 8) were made. This, Gorra (2019) suggested, helped to make sense of the data.

When coding, Charmaz (2014) advocated using labels to organise the data. They described what each segment was about to better understand what was happening in each scene. As such, Kelle (2014) and Thornberry and Charmaz (2014) stated that open codes which indicated interesting leads should be identified. Initial codes included examples such as 'leading others' or 'doing the work with middle leaders'

and became more concentrated as codes became more closely linked. Examples included 'be willing to challenge others', 'unstable staffing', 'mental model' and 'focus on small gains'. Figure 7 provides an example of initial coding. Codes were action orientated (Charmaz, 2014). The use of red font gives an example of the constant comparison between literature and other interview transcripts during the coding stages.

Figure 7: Example of Coding (Interview Transcript School Leader A)

<p>Interviewer: So how did you identify what to do first? If you think of one particular school.</p> <p>MAT Leader A: No, no, I think that's a good question. I think in the beginning, you don't know where to start. So, when you first started there was very little codification of what we do....so a lot of it is trial and error. You go in and you're like ok so where do we start and I think but mentally I learnt that Head of Department is probably the first person you want to work with as like getting your systems in place so like knowing [inaudible] what you're teaching when, does everyone know what they're teaching and when? Erm is there a clear is there clarity around what students are learning each lesson? Basically things are not in place so revision guides might not be in place. So you say let's buy some revision guides and then you need to make sure the follow up of that is happening then you would do learning walks to make sure students have got revision guides in lessons. Erm...and then you might, once you've got those structures in place, once you've essentially got a curriculum and we were helped I think because we had a lot of common assessments and things and a common curriculum so that, I suppose, some of it was around implementing that, so if we hadn't have had like a err a common approach to a 5-year curriculum I think it would have been much harder so that was one of the first things we did. We said right ok, here's the curriculum model and let's implement it. So that's the first step and then here are the common assessments, let's implement them.</p> <p>Interviewer: and how do schools that are in difficulty respond to that?</p> <p>MAT Leader A: Generally, well. I mean it's difficult because you can get this fake buy in where people of a certain bias go yes, yes, yes and then you go and you realize that and so I think maybe that happens to a certain extent but more often than not, people were really crying out for support. Like if you think of [name of second school] I mean [name of school] are a good example of the turnaround school erm [name of school] was a very difficult school to change for a long time and I think that's because we never really had any real tools to go in there and actually bring around change. So you would go in as a single network lead, you may observe a few lessons and give a bit of feedback but that will not have any lasting change really because 1 network lead there 1 day a week it's really hard to shift someone's practice err if you are, if you are just the outsider coming in as well.</p>	<p>Unsure of where to begin when in schools. Sought models to guide work with school leaders. Unsure of where to begin when in schools.</p> <p>Unsure of which leader to focus work with.</p> <p>Asking questions of leaders. Trying to find out what to focus on first. Unstable provision for lesson / student revision.</p> <p>Taking active steps to support the practical delivery of teaching.</p> <p>Putting structures in place was important. MAT models used in this instance. MAT curriculum model implemented.</p> <p>Seeking to establish relationships with leaders/teachers in school. Aware this might not be genuine. Agrees with Lit review that leaders want help in teaching and learning and leadership. This school's leaders were also interviewed.</p> <p>Unsure of where to begin when in schools. Sought models to guide work with school leaders. Compare to what name of school says. Sees role as key in bringing about change. Found it hard to change teacher practice. Feeling of being an outsider.</p>
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Secondly, Figure 8 illustrates the use of memo notes written during the coding process to capture thoughts, comparisons, connections, and ideas during phase 1 of the interview process (Charmaz, 2014).

Figure 8: Example of Memo Notes from Phase 1

Memo notes from School Leader D interview:

- Ready written curriculum important – core subjects (MAT Leader A also said it is useful as a tool – MAT Leader A, School Leaders A and D all say they now use it to bring about improvement)
- Use of models to show teachers and leaders how to improve – by showing them examples of what they are looking for – School Leader D and MAT Leader A both refer to this - School Leader D - this was at teacher level, with MAT Leader A, at teacher and leader level.
- Instability in staffing – School Leaders A, B and D say this
- Reflective nature of the interview process: some leaders (A and D) comment on the opportunity to reflect on their work to date
- Subject specific leads – MAT Leader A, School Leaders A, B, D all comment on this; the 2 schools in transition want(ed) this kind of work to happen. Their role working with middle leaders – School Leaders A and D both say this – showing examples or sharing experiences to bring about improvement.
- Does this lead to a dependence on MAT leader role for validation of change? School Leaders B and D suggest this. This is a change; leaders need someone else to support – but how do we know the MAT leader knows?

Phase 1 provided a set of codes which supported the data collection for phase 2, where they could be refined further. Table 13 provides examples of how codes were developed between interview phases and documentary analysis:

Table 13: Development of codes from interview phases 1 and 2 and documentary analysis

Examples of codes that:	Codes from Phase 1 to Phase 2 Interviews:	In relation to Documentary Analysis, codes:
remained unchanged	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One size does not fit all. • MAT curriculum model implemented. • Had worked elsewhere in the MAT. • Be willing to challenge others • Started working early with school leaders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • also evident in Documentary Analysis

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unsure where to begin when in schools. • Unsure of which leader to focus work with. • Asking questions of leaders. Trying to find out what to focus on first. • Found it hard to change teacher practice. • Struggled to recruit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not evident in Documentary Analysis
were dropped from Phase 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unstable provision for lesson / student revision. • Candour. • Leaders not aware of changes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not evident in Documentary Analysis
were altered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Taking active steps to support the practical delivery of teaching' was changed to 'codify the model'. • The codes 'Leader provided practical examples', 'MAT models used' and 'Mental Models' were merged into 'codify the model'. • 'Focus on small details' altered to 'focus on small gains'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • also evident in Documentary Analysis • Focus on small gains remained unchanged at this point.
were new	<p>In Phase 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leader provided practical examples. • Role kept changing. <p>In Documentary Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live Practice as part of coaching. • Not all teachers wanted to improve. • Socioeconomic disadvantage. • Sporting analogy to represent practice (comparison back to Phase 1 revealed one interview). 	

NVIVO supported continual movement between the transcripts, literature, documentary data and re-play of original recordings. Figure 9 details how emergent themes were categorised and then reorganised in relation to research questions

. Figure 9: Phase 2 initial categorising of data in relation to research questions:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● RQ1a. School Leaders' Perce... ▼ ● RQ1b. Challenges faced by S... ● 1. Lack of clarity in roles a... ● 2. Low morale ● 3. Recruitment issues ● 4. Weak teaching ● 5. Learning Environment ▼ ● RQ1c. Enacted Role of Leader ● RQ3b. Role evolved ● RQ2a. Trust Leaders' Percep... ● RQ2b. Challenges faced by t... ● RQ2c. Enacted role of the Tr... ▼ ● RQ3. Role of the MAT ▶ ● 1. Codify the model ● 2. Curriculum model need... ● 3. Learning from practice i... ● 4. MAT Leader Support ● 5. Professional Developm... ▼ ● 6. Trust leader and school... ● Autonomy ● RQ4a. The sponsored acade... ● RQ4b. Advice ▼ ● RQ4c. Retention of leaders ● 1. Had more than one role... ● 2. Commitment to stay ● RQ4d. Focus on small gains ● RQ4e. No one size fits all 	<p>Interviewer: When you said that the netv</p> <p>School Leader M: So I suppose she knew the the vision of you know of known the specification try</p> <p>Interviewer: How did she support you in</p> <p>School Leader M: Yes, so as you're aware, a literally just come in and s would say, 'do you need m inspector comes in? He'll b about that. I just. I'm here remember her going into th</p> <p>Interviewer: So were you able to see the</p> <p>School Leader M: Oh yeah definitely. Definite before from [name of previ that they wouldn't cross the guidance rather than anything can sense-check through us anything that I did really. S coped as well if I didn't hav</p> <p>Interviewer: And so [name of subject] is What did it start to look like</p> <p>School Leader M: I've got I think the biggest s point, I was literally Head c the first year essentially I c could train, people that I k looked like. Um and I buil</p>
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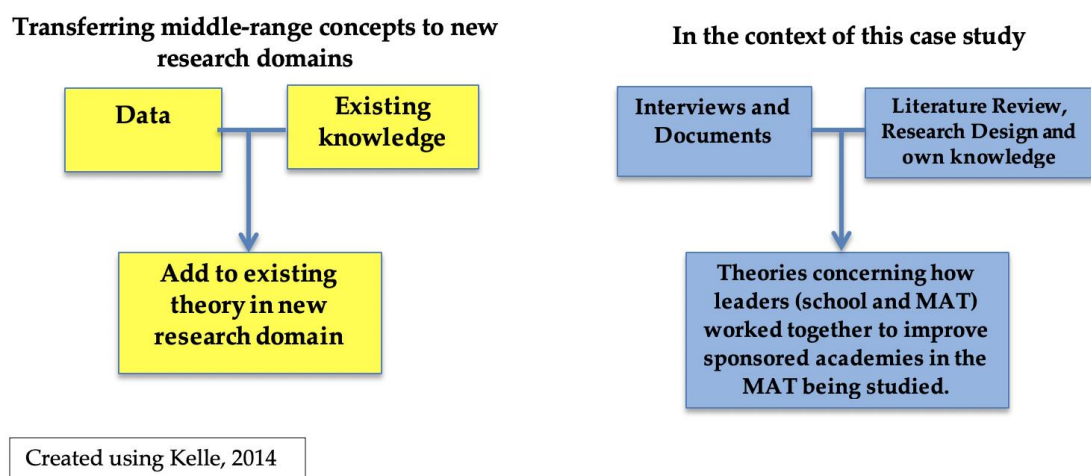
7.6 Theorising from the data

To deduce meaning, traditionally, researchers have applied deductive or inductive approaches. Peirce (1974) however, proposed making an inference from an observation in data collection to a theoretical explanation known as 'abduction'. The approach allowed for theory to emerge from a single observation, which in the context of the research, a single case, the leadership of a MAT in England. Theoretical explanations could include literature and grand or mid-range theories. The literature or theory examined, provided the point of explanation. Moreover, research (Yin, 2003; Flyvbjerg, 2001; Thomas, 2013; Thomas, 2015; Candappa 2017) showed that the case study approach was traditionally associated with generating understandings from data collected. Gilgun (2014) and Kelle (2014) noted that it did

not require observation to be true just because it can be found or related to literature and therefore, alternative explanations were possible. Literature level examples did though, need to be able to be related to the perspective of the data to avoid comparing contextually influenced data with more abstract, grand theory.

In this context, a single MAT in England was a relatively new domain in education, having opened its first sponsored academy in 2006 following the inception of the government policy on academies in 2002. As such, it was reasonable to suggest that the role of the MAT leader was also new. Early analysis indicated leaders operated in a network when they collaborated across schools which suggested that leaders belonged to a range of 'within MAT' communities. Kelle (2014, p.11) stated that to theorise from the data, the 'Transfer [of] middle-range concepts to new research domains' was used, as illustrated in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Theorisation from data



7.7 Reliability and Validity

There has been some debate concerning whether qualitative research can be considered reliable. Reliability was traditionally associated with positivist orientations. Thomas (2016) explained that researchers should not however, spend time becoming tangled up in the process of claiming reliability. Likewise, Flyvberg (2001) returned to the origins of the case study to argue that contextual knowledge, a key element within case studies, could contribute to the development of knowledge.

There were however practical issues that could affect the validity of data collected and therefore the reliability of findings in a small-scale study. Robson and McCartan (2016) and Yin (2018) identified that participants might for example, suffer from lapses in memory. Participants were asked to recall their early experiences in their schools and as such, forgetting detail was likely. Literature (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011; Robson and McCartan, 2016) also found that omitting insights could be further complicated by participants themselves being biased and inaccurately self-reporting their role.

Additionally, the nature of semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility. This could have further provoked bias on the part of participant or interviewer. Being an insider was further complicated through being a senior leader within a MAT school. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) stated it was particularly important because

being an insider could create bias through seeking answers to pre-conceived notions or misunderstanding what the participant was saying. This was addressed through using a similarly structured approach to the interview schedule, making questions as clear and putting participants at ease by reassuring of anonymity. Examples of interview schedules are included as Appendices 3 and 4.

Moreover, documentary data could increase the reliability of what was reported in interview. Documents contributed to a deeper contextual insight to illuminate what was said or to support themes emerging. Alternatively, using further insider perspectives, could perpetuate a limited point of view. Thomas (2013) noted that documents supported a triangulation of the data that might address concerns regarding credibility and trustworthiness. This was helpful because it was concerned with exploring leaders' perspectives and ideas, which appeared in published and publicly available documents (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). This has though, been criticized as it did not necessarily reduce bias and as such, a complete explanation of the object of study may not be achieved or indeed, sought. As a result, issues of validity could not be erased from the research process (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011).

Through being aware of these challenges, descriptions concerning how the study was carried out were included in the thesis to support trustworthiness and credibility (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Eisner, 1991). Examples are evident in section 7.4. Here, the

use of theoretical sampling was presented, whilst Tables 10 to 12 detailed the rationale for selection of participants and documents. Furthermore, constant comparison of data, the use of memos, and coding (Beuving and Vries, 2014), as discussed in section 7.5 further evidenced the research process (Whittemore *et al.*, 2001; Robson and McCartan, 2016). The continual return to original audio files and literature supported authentic reporting of participants' perspectives.

Semi-structured interviews further reduced the potential for misunderstanding as questions could be tailored to suit participants' contexts and experiences (Lincoln and Guba, 1981). This enabled an in-depth picture to evolve which in turn, helped to build trust with participants (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Additionally, a phased approach to interviews allowed emergent themes to be tested and discussed with participants. Alongside this, triangulation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), represented through cross referencing data, detailed in Figure 6, helped to create a persuasive narrative and identify areas that were more and less consistent (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Eisner, 1991). Finally, setting the context of the MAT in Chapter 2, together with a detailed description of leader experience and school context in Chapter 8 supported the presentation of a coherent case (Eisner, 1991).

7.8 Ethical Considerations

As an insider ensuring that participants who were interviewed as part of the study were able to share their experiences candidly was an issue. Protecting anonymity needed to be considered carefully. Participants were supported using a School Leader Information Sheet and a Consent Form which included the opportunity to withdraw (Appendices 1 and 2). Participants could review their own transcripts if they wished and withdraw from the process if they wished.

Time and confidentiality were also a consideration for leaders. To alleviate this, participants gave written, voluntary consent, reassured of anonymity and interviews took place in a private setting. They were also reminded that their data would be stored confidentially and anonymously. As such, interviews and observations were carried out within the requirements of the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2018). In addition, ethical clearance from the University of Birmingham was sought and obtained (Appendices 1 to 4).

Finally, interviews explored the lived experiences and actions which the selected leaders took during their work. To retain anonymity, individual names or identifying features were not made available in any publication or to any other organisation or individual, and any indication made to participants was via alphabetic reference. Data was stored in accordance with the University of Birmingham guidelines.

7.9 Summary

In this chapter, the research design of the study was considered. In philosophical terms, the research sat within an interpretivist paradigm. Data were qualitative. It was concerned with the perceptions of individuals, their experiences and context. Others might have interpreted these situations in different ways. A constant comparative method of analysis was used across the two sets of interviews and documentary evidence. From here, themes emerged which could be explored in relation to the research questions. The research sought and gained ethical approval from the University of Birmingham Research Ethics Committee. It complied with BERA guidelines and participants gave written consent. In the following chapters, the empirical findings of the data with emergent themes are presented and compared to literature discussed in Chapters 3 to 5.

CHAPTER 8: RESULTS

8.0 Introduction

Discussion of each school or MAT Leaders begins with a summary of participants and documents included. This reflected the idea described by Bauman (2008) of a loose knit community in existence across the MAT. Data was explored by school or MAT Leaders and then phase and documents (all data). 5 nests, 2 phases and 9 documents were analysed.

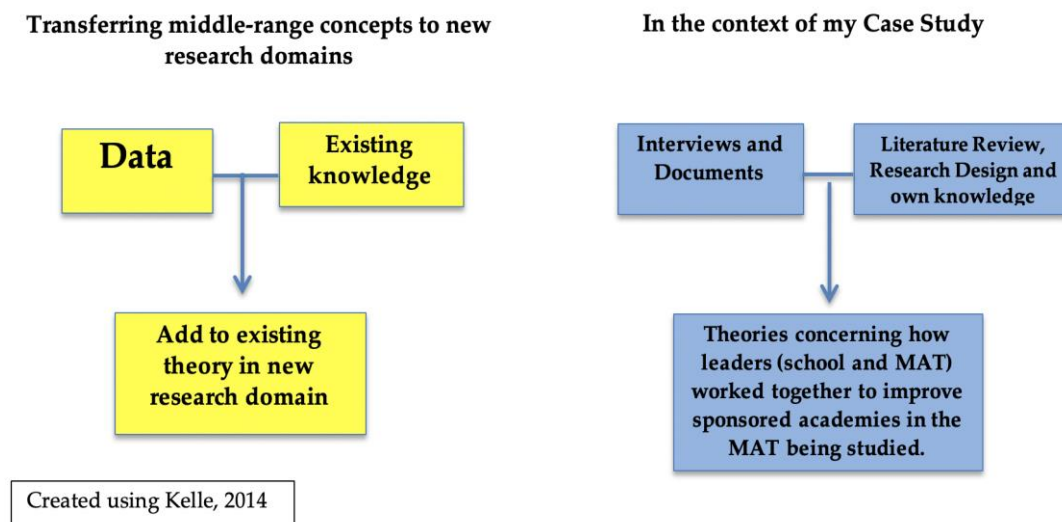
At the end of each analysis, the ways in which the section contributed to answering the four research questions were noted to represent this as a constantly evolving picture. Not all sections contributed to answering all four research questions which were:

1. How did the leaders in the sponsored academies perceive and enact their roles in school improvement?
2. How did leaders from the MAT perceive and enact their roles in school improvement in sponsored academies?

3. How did the roles of the school leader and the leader(s) from the MAT interact in relation to school improvement in the MAT?
4. What can be learned about the leadership of school improvement from the common and varying experiences of leaders across the MAT in this context?

A descriptive analysis of leaders' lived experiences of the sponsored academy situated in a MAT context was provided. To address the research questions, data analysis was combined with theoretical perspectives to add to existing research domains using the reproduced Figure 10 from Chapter 7:

Figure 10: Theorisation from Data



8.1 MAT Leader Analysis

8.1.1 Introduction

Interview and documentary data were synthesised with key literature relating to instructional leadership, style and role to explore the role of MAT leaders and how they interacted with school leaders. Where relevant, contributions from other leaders were included. The chapter explores key themes that emerged from the data, with an analysis of:

- Challenges faced by school leaders: MAT leaders' perspectives
- The role of the MAT leader
- MAT leader priorities
- Approaches adopted by MAT leaders in schools
- Challenges to standardised approaches

To inform the discussion, section 1.2 sets the context of the MAT leadership roles of participants interviewed and documents analysed.

8.1.2 MAT Leader Context

In his recent research on school leadership in multi-school groups, Greany (2018) found that MATs having a central team who supported underperforming schools

was important. In the context of this study, 4 MAT leaders were interviewed. These participants were not based at an individual school. Instead, they worked with school leaders across a range of schools in the MAT.

MAT Leaders A and C facilitated training for teachers and leaders from across the MAT. Although they were part of a team based in one region, they travelled across all geographical regions to support school leaders. MAT leaders B and D however, were based in a single regional centre operated by the MAT. They worked with a smaller number of schools and focused on individual disciplines. Table 12, replicated below, indicates which schools MAT leaders supported.

Table 12: MAT Leaders and support across academies

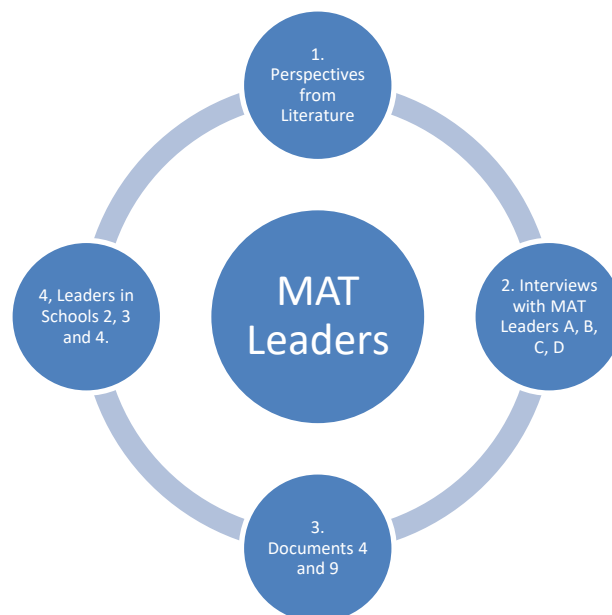
		Trust Leaders had supported academy leaders in:			
		School 1	School 2	Schools 3	School 4
MAT Leaders	MAT Leader A	✓	✓		✓
	MAT Leader B	✓		✓	✓
	MAT Leader C	✓	✓	✓	✓
	MAT Leader D	✓		✓	✓

It became clear through documentary analysis, that other perspectives could add to the story of these leaders. As such, data included 2 documents written by MAT leaders. Document 4 was a blog published on the MAT website written in July 2019

by another MAT leader whose role focused on curriculum. Document 9 was an article published in December 2019 in a journal focused on educational governance. It was written by 2 senior MAT leaders who held different roles to those interviewed. They were included because their roles meant that they worked with school leaders. They focused on developing instructional leadership across senior leadership in the MAT.

To give additional insight into the organisation of the analysis, the diagram in Figure 11, foregrounded the discussion which followed. Key literature related to Circle 1 concerned leadership roles, practice and the time taken to improve struggling schools. Instructional leadership in practice was also considered in literature and data in this section, alongside the use of collaboration between MAT and school leaders. Circle 2 detailed the interview participants, with documents 4 and 8 noted in circle 3. Circle 4 recorded related perspectives between MAT leaders interviewed in circle 2 and school leaders in schools 2, 3 and 4. These provided further insight into collaboration in practice and the implementation of instructional leadership approaches.

Figure 11: Aspects of literature and data used to tell MAT leaders' stories



The analysis concluded in section 8 with a short discussion of how MAT leaders' stories and documentary data contributed to answering the research questions.

8.1.3 Challenges faced by school leaders: MAT leaders' perspectives

Firstly, interview data revealed that MAT leaders wanted to understand the challenges faced by school leaders. MAT Leader A stated: 'They've come from some pretty tough places so they might be in Special Measures, they might be RI and they've had poor leadership for 5 years. These teachers haven't ever seen what good looks like. If you have never seen what good or great looks like, it's hard to do it'.

With reference to School 4, MAT Leader A described how:

...there weren't clear schemes of work, students were being entered for inappropriate courses...the structural parts. As such you are dealing in quite dysfunctional places. [You] want to understand where people are coming from.

The need to understand the school context contributed towards addressing a gap in school improvement research. Eyles *et al.* (2017) identified little was known about the actions that leaders took which led to improvement. This was further underlined by studies (Hopkins and Lagerweij in Reynolds *et al.*, 1996; Greany; 2018; Ofsted; 2019) which showed that identification of the impact of leaders' actions tended to focus on student outcomes rather than leadership practice. As such, more research was needed.

However, participants presented a different view in the context of school improvement. Heifetz (1994) noted that policymakers sought rapid improvement from school leaders. Indeed, Chapman, Mujis and MacAllister (2011) identified that a minimum of two years was required whilst Andrews *et al.* (2017) suggested it took longer to impact on student outcomes. Yet MAT leaders interviewed were more focused in discussion on when their work with school leaders in the newly sponsored academy could start. MAT Leader A shared: 'some schools that are transitioning now aren't even under the [name of MAT] brand but I go in'. Whilst MAT Leader D noted:

the more time you could have with the [title of leader] and the heads of department, where you sit with them to understand beforehand. We need to understand more about their situation to get that groundwork in.

This resonated with the experience of School Leader I: 'systems and structures were slowly being put into place'. What was interesting about the leaders' responses was that starting to work with schools early was discussed more than the amount of time they should expect a single school's improvement journey to take. This concurred with studies which identified that schools have different starting points (Reynolds, Potter and Chapman, 2001; MacBeath *et al.*, 2007). Such between-school variation could though, add to the complexity of the role of the MAT leader seeking to identify what to focus on first and with whom.

8.1.4 The role of the MAT leader

Variety was not only limited to schools' starting points. MAT leaders held varying views concerning who they should establish relationships with. Literature (Gronn, 2000; Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd, 2009; West-Burnham, 2018) agreed that relationships were increasingly valued while research (Goss 2005 in Hill *et al.*, 2012; Schleicher, 2012) further concluded that collaboration was not just the responsibility of leaders but indicative of strong leadership. By strengthening leadership in struggling schools, the MAT leader brought about collaboration. MAT Leader A

identified: 'the Head of Department is probably the first person you want to work with, getting your systems in place'. The use of 'probably' suggested that MAT Leader A's perspective emerged over time. It also indicated that while collaboration was valued, research was currently limited in how such interaction might work in practice.

This was further highlighted as MAT Leader A's perspective changed during interview: 'the secret is to make sure you're working at a leadership level at a senior leadership level and you're not just going in at a Head of Department level.' MAT Leader D agreed that they were: 'heavily reliant on working alongside Vice Principals or other leads.' While there is some continuity here between the idea of working with leaders, the speculative tone indicated the complexity of establishing relationships with leaders. It suggested that the role of the MAT leader relied on collaboration. If, as Goss 2005 in Hill *et al.* (2012) and Schleicher (2012) suggested, strong leadership included collaboration, alongside the heightened challenges of the struggling school environment, this could be a complex task.

In addition, the variation in perspective reflected research associated with role theory. Day and Harrison (2007) identified that experience enabled leaders to broaden their engagement with others and work more collectively. MAT Leader A stated: 'the best Principals are the ones who essentially say: 'you know what, let's just hear it as it is''. The view was shared by School Leader H: 'the best MAT leaders

would come and be open with me about what was happening'. However, MAT Leader C felt that engaging executive leaders was important:

...no matter what I do, it will not have impact unless it has RD [Regional Director] and [school] senior leaders' support. And that goes for schools in crisis.

Similarly, to MAT Leaders A and D, MAT Leader C perceived that their own role was limited to providing leadership development because school leaders needed to 'own it'.

The role of the MAT leader in supporting relationship building between leaders across schools was also identified. MAT Leader D described how they brought leaders from a range of schools together: 'I think one of the things that helped, was having the [leadership area] leads meetings together because knowing that everyone was having the same conversation [at the same time]'. The variation here concerning how leaders identified who to work with, suggested that MAT leaders' roles in this context, were, in a constant 'state of becoming' (Gjerde and Ladegard, 2019 p.46). Biddle (1979) and Day and Harrison (2007) further identified that they not only needed to learn new skills in leadership across schools but had to retain those learned through previous roles.

However, analysis of documents suggested that the MAT leader was not as widely represented in comparison to the narratives of school leaders. The interview data in this research therefore provided some insight. MAT Leader D suggested part of their role was to: 'meet with the Head of Department, talk about the needs of the department and understand how to break down a curriculum and at certain check-points'. Furthermore, MAT Leader C explained the importance of leaders being engaged in improving teacher practice:

[make] this people's priority on their timetables. [Name of MAT leader] is seeing a lot of instructional leaders and principals doing this and firmly believes that [they] need to be able to do it as well.

The views reflected research studies (Creemers and Kyriakides, 2008; CUREE, 2009; OECD, 2014) interested in instructional leadership, which suggested that Principals needed to be close to daily practice. What was interesting though, was that the perspective focused on the executive level of leader and school Principal, rather than the MAT leaders deployed to support leaders directly in schools. This mirrored Hvidston *et al.* (2015) and Bush and Glover (2016) that one of the challenges to the Instructional Leader was that it was operationally unclear and could be overly reliant on one person.

Where the perspective of a MAT leader was included, it featured in Document 3 which explored the importance of curriculum. Here the author described that a

curriculum should be: 'logically sequenced and coherently experienced by that child. This is also for the good of teachers: they should have clarity about how much children are expected to have learned'. This also reflected literature (Chapman and Muji, 2013; Chapman, 2013; 2015) which found that much of what is known about how they work, was limited. Given that the MAT leaders' stories in the case study were in the 1% of MATs made up of more than 30 schools, their accounts could make a purposeful contribution towards increasing this knowledge.

8.1.5 MAT leader priorities

Interview data suggested that MAT leaders sought to develop relationships, rather than positional authority with school leaders. Responses were explored to identify the idea of their role being that of an 'insider-outsider'. It was framed by two studies (Day and Harrison, 2007; DeRue and Ashford, 2010) which suggested little was known about how leaders developed relationships with others. In this context, the MAT leader was a member of the MAT and therefore an insider, but an outsider in each school. MAT Leader A shared:

...you are there to shine a light up, you're holding a mirror up and saying: 'yeah I'm going to help you, but this is what you look like'. [It was]: 'really tough' because: you're an outsider from the beginning, so they may view you as a threat.

What was interesting and indeed, an unusual view, was that MAT Leader A felt: 'actually more threatened by them' because 'you're the person from [name of MAT] that's coming in'.

MAT leaders also encountered variation in challenge when building relationships.

MAT Leader A likened the experience to being:

...invited round to someone's house, they all know each other and you're sitting down around the table, and you've got to now point out that actually the food isn't particularly nice, the drink is bad, and the fridge is at the wrong temperature. Essentially what you're doing is, you're pointing out all the problems. Some school leaders asked: 'What do you know about teaching? You're out of the classroom and I'm in a transition school and it's really hard, whereas others were really crying out for support'.

The latter perspective identified with literature (Earl in Timperley *et al.*, 2007; Kutash *et al.*, 2016) concerning struggling school leaders needing help to know which teaching practices were most effective. It also concurred with Ball (2003) who stated that the impact of a lack of clarity could cause leaders to suffer from anxiety and self-doubt. MAT Leader D sought to alleviate the issue by saying: 'it is a supportive role, it's not changing what they're doing, but it's looking at what they're doing'. The viewpoint was mirrored by MAT Leader B who sought to focus on positivity: 'I like them [to be] the best teacher that they can be'. As such, you 'just want to add

capacity' (MAT Leader A). Both Mujis *et al.* (2004) and Diamond and Spillane (2016) showed that distributing leadership increased sustainability. OECD (2014) agreed, identifying that such decision-making was likely to extend beyond the role of the principal. In the context of the newly sponsored academy and this research, this could relate to the role of the MAT leader. What participants indicated though, was that while the intention of relationship building was valid, in practice, this was complex to achieve.

8.1.6 Approaches adopted by MAT Leaders in schools

Gorard (2014) identified that aspects of change more commonly associated with academy sponsorship included alterations to school names, buildings, and identities. Yet these elements were less prominent in data. Leaders interviewed and writing in Documents 4 and 9 stated that they valued having their own models or MAT-wide approaches to support school leaders. They did not though, use the same ones. MAT Leader C felt that the role of the MAT leader was to help leaders to focus: 'You pick the thing that is going to really cause the most improvement and drive that hard and if you don't see that happening then you either chose the wrong thing or you're not doing it right'. MAT Leader A agreed: 'I think focus is fundamental in school improvement. The fewer things done well...let's just stick with it and make it great'. These points of view also reflected the experiences of leaders in schools 2

and 4 who commonly discussed the importance of selecting few priorities. Where diversity existed though, was in what to focus on and with whom, further highlighting the complexity of the MAT leader role.

Secondly, Chapman (2015) identified that one of the challenges faced by leaders in struggling schools was having sufficient access to robust research evidence. Participants valued having specific approaches to their work with school leaders. MAT Leader A explained: '[School 2] was a good example of a very difficult school to change because we never really had any real tools to go in there and bring change'. This highlighted the importance of having models to help leaders carry out their roles. MAT Leader A stated these might have been derived from their own prior experience where they gained: 'a very clear model of how to sort it out'. Having 'done it yourself' in previous roles, MAT Leader D elaborated: 'the credibility comes from people knowing that [they've] done this in [name of academy]'. In practice then: 'You know the importance of the five-year curriculum model, you know the importance of good quality assessments, you know the importance of giving feedback'.

The author of Document 4 agreed with the principle that leaders should agree on the best approaches to use: 'teachers contribute to those discussions, and everyone involved ought to agree to be bound by the results, where: professional autonomy occurs at the point where they [teachers] are charged with deploying their skills and

the most effective methods'. MAT Leader B, however, was more focused on supporting teachers to establish expectations: 'if they haven't got that culture right it's no good fixing teaching before we've got the behaviour'. These perspectives supported the limitations highlighted by Hill *et al.* (2012, p.68) that: 'This is the model – follow it' and instead agreed that 'it is much more complex and subtle than that'. This suggested that whilst models were valued, in practice, such models did not necessarily originate from a single source. It was likely that they emerged from a combination of MAT leaders' own experience, school context and agreed, MAT-wide approaches.

To extend internal models that they had developed from their own experience, some leaders referred to the influence of Charter Schools in the United States. MAT Leader D stated that: 'Having models in place or something successful that works has been really liberating'. Whilst MAT Leader C explained: 'the model happens to understand the difference between what that model is showing them and what they're doing'. Document 9 added: 'the implementation gaps and the precise action steps (the 'name it' part of the coaching cycle). It's one thing to name the strengths and deficits in teacher practice, it's another to systematically replicate or improve upon them'.

These perspectives were interesting and potentially unusual. They not only agreed across the contexts of interview and documentary data, but they supported research carried out by Berliner (2004) who highlighted the importance of using context free

approaches to developing novice practice. Leaders explained in Document 9 that: 'looking at what the best teachers do and codifying it [suggests] others can assimilate it quickly in training'. In the context of coaching teachers, MAT Leader A noted: 'if you can actually provide data, your conversation just shifts to a factual level'. Moreover, the writers in documents 4 and 9 challenged Fryer's (2015) perspective which found leaders struggled to name strategies used in their daily practice. The data overall adds to an emergent narrative that the role of the MAT leader was complex.

8.1.7 Challenges to standardised approaches

Although MAT leaders valued having specific strategies, they also acknowledged that MAT-wide models presented challenges. This was because not all schools in the MAT were in crisis. Similarly, in literature (Stoll *et al.*, in Reynolds *et al.*, 1996; Hargreaves, 2010; Hopkins, 2013; Diamond and Spillane, 2016; Chapman, 2019) over time, less attention was paid to 'one size fits all' strategies in favour of leaders being able to use a blend of approaches as appropriate to the school context. Where schools were in a more stable position, the MAT leaders' role changed to become one where, as MAT Leader A found: 'you're giving them a series of possibilities.'

More widely, in developing system leadership, MAT Leader C stated:

We can't do a one size fits all on PD. The span is too great because: what doesn't work is, is somebody centrally coming into a school and delivering PD...if they don't own it themselves and drive it to success, it won't have any success.

MAT Leader B agreed: 'we are a network of schools, but the school is tweaking it for their own circumstances'. Literature (Bush and Glover, 2014; Hargreaves, 2014; Godfrey, 2017) suggested that schools collaborating in professional development became more common through System Leadership. Although participants' perspectives also supported Higham, Hopkins, Matthews (2009) who suggested that research was needed to understand what this looked like in practice and how leaders were deployed between schools.

The need for additional research concerning the complexity of MAT leaders' roles was further shared in Document 9. Here, MAT leaders, concluded that: 'The role of anyone working across more than one school is very complex'. In interview, MAT Leader A reflected that:

...although teaching and learning was one of the goals, it was probably the hardest thing to change. In the beginning, you don't know where to start and you don't line manage anybody, yet you need to be able to approach things from other people's points of view.

MAT Leader B also identified the importance of working with a teacher over a sustained period: 'see where, where they need to go rather than go in one week do a lesson observation, do something and then leave them'. These stories supported Chapman's (2015) research which suggested leaders had limited access to robust research evidence to guide them in knowing what to do. Moreover, even when they could access MAT-wide approaches, MAT Leader C noted that school leaders: 'had to go back [and] figure out what they would do with them'. These narratives indicated that there are 'no silver bullets in education' (Document 6, p.7) or as Hopkins (2013) and Chapman (2019) showed, no 'one size fits all'.

8.1.8 How the data contributed to answering the research questions

This section summarises the ways in which the literature, interview and documentary data from MAT Leaders helped to answer research questions 2 and 3.

RQ2: How did leaders from the MAT perceive and enact their roles in school improvement in sponsored academies?

MAT leaders perceived that part of their role when working with school leaders involved gaining an understanding of the context influencing school leaders' and the challenges they faced. The MAT leaders appeared sympathetic in their attitude towards school leaders. This was interesting when compared to Greany (2018) and Ofsted (2019) who found that existing research focused on student outcomes rather

than leadership practice. The view was even more pertinent in the context of the relatively new role of the MAT leader deployed to work alongside school leaders. Secondly, some MAT leaders perceived that MAT-wide approaches to teacher development and curriculum could help them to support school leaders more effectively. These insights contrasted with Gorard (2014) who showed that change in the struggling school context often focused on more visible elements such as the school's name, buildings, or identity. However, diversity occurred in the approaches that MAT leaders adopted. The combination of personal 'mental models' with MAT-wide approaches fitted with Hill *et al.* (2012) who suggested that leading change was complex. It was interesting to see that an arguably generic perspective extended to the relatively new role of the MAT leader.

RQ3: How did the roles of the school leader and the leader(s) from the MAT interact in relation to school improvement in the MAT?

MAT leaders identified that time was a key consideration when working with leaders in struggling schools. They started working with leaders as early as possible. Leaders were also less concerned with a prescribed timeframe for improvement. This supported literature (MacBeath *et al.*, 2007, Chapman, Mujis and MacAllister, 2011; Andrews *et al.*, 2017) who showed little agreement concerning the timescales needed with even longer being required for improvement to show in student outcomes.

Furthermore, literature (Gronn, 2000; Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd, 2009; West-Burnham, 2018) identified the importance of relationships. In practice however, variation existed in respect of which leaders they should build relationships with. One explanation could be because each MAT leader interviewed held a different role and were positioned either regionally or nationally. The MAT leader's role in each school varied along with the leaders they supported. This reinforced the view that MAT leader roles, like school leader roles were likely to be in a constant 'state of becoming' (Gjerde and Ladegard, 2019, p.46).

The final point of interest was the representation of the role of the MAT leader in documentation. Here, the role was less visible. This supported research (Hvidston *et al.*, 2015; Bush and Glover, 2016) focused on instructional leadership which noted that such roles were challenging through being operationally unclear and reliant on one person. It also agreed with interview data which suggested that the MAT leader role provided variable opportunity to directly influence individual teacher practice. This also concurred with a point raised in Document 9 and Fullan (2019), that the roles of leaders responsible for school improvement across multiple schools was complex.

8.2 School 1 Analysis

8.2.1 Introduction

The MAT leaders' analysis focused on the role of the MAT leader. Data raised questions about how their roles interacted with the school leaders. The same approach of combining interview and documentary data with literature relating to instructional leadership, role and the ways in which leaders belonged to professional communities were used in School 1, as outlined in Figure 12 in section 8.2.2. Where relevant, contributions from other leaders were included to develop the discussion. This chapter explores key themes that emerged from the data, with an analysis of the:

- Perceptions of the turnaround context
- Challenges experienced by school leaders
- Strategies adopted by school leaders
- School leaders' approaches to their roles

The leaders in School 1 all belonged to one school which joined the MAT prior to 2010. The school was a smaller than an average sized secondary school with a long history in the local community. It was situated close to a city centre. Students eligible for free school meals and students for whom English was an additional language was higher than the national average. The data was in line with the MAT mission to

educate 'the poorest and most disenfranchised in society', (Document 2, p.12). Students entered the school with lower than average, levels of attainment. The number of students on roll was decreasing. When the school joined the MAT, the school's name was changed. The school went on to achieve an outstanding judgement in inspection.

8.2.2 Context of School 1

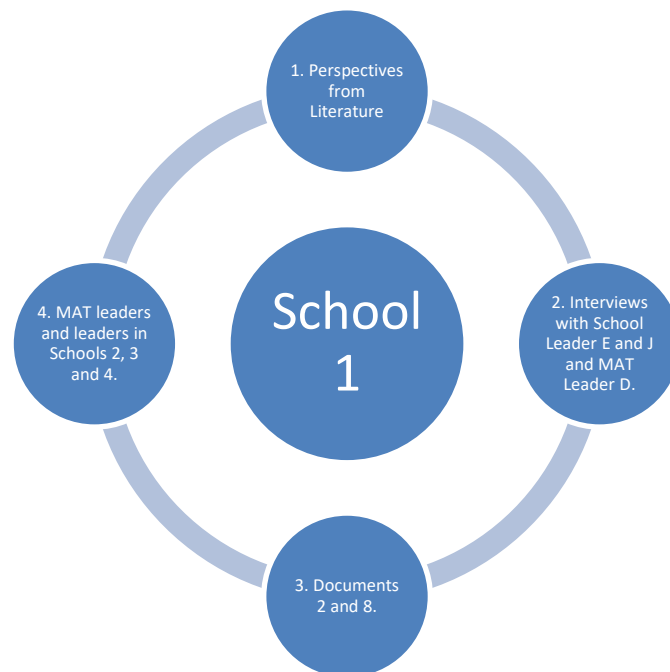
Three leaders were interviewed in this school. None of the participants interviewed were employed by the predecessor school. Two additional leaders from the school were cited in the documents that were part of the analysis. Of these two leaders, one was employed by the predecessor school. The documents included in the analysis were:

- Document 2: an internally written and published MAT Annual Report in 2015
- Document 8: a government produced case study of the MAT published in 2014

The literature related to Circle 1 considered the time taken to improve schools, and whether focusing on improving teacher practice or classroom teachers should be a priority. It also considered challenges faced by the struggling school concerned with recruitment and how teachers shared practice when associated with accountability.

The ways teachers participated in wider learning communities in the MAT was also explored.

Figure 12: Aspects of literature and data used to tell leaders' stories in School 1



8.2.3 Perceptions of the turnaround context

Documents were written from internal and external perspectives and included further details on the context of the school. In Document 8, the author explained that:

Over half of students qualify for free school meals, more than three times the national average. Three quarters of the student body speak a first language other than English, five times the national average.

This in some part, highlighted one aspect of the challenges faced by school leaders. The writer went on to describe how the student population comprised those who had experienced 'high mobility and large numbers of students with no experience of formal education.', (Document 8).

The ideas were also illustrated by the corporate author in Document 2 who explored the context for school improvement in its own internally produced report. The headteacher had, at the time: 'sought out academy sponsorship to secure the future of an institution that had served [the region] for over a century. Back then, it had a falling roll and did not have a strong reputation for academic excellence', (Document 2). From experience, the leader stated: 'When I first came, [name of Principal] said that we were going to get all students five A*- C grades, including English and Mathematics. That was a ground-breaking thing in a school where previously only a few students achieved that', (Document 2).

The choice of school in both documents given the time between when the school joined the MAT and when the documents were published (2014/15) could reflect Heifetz's (1994) and Chapman, Mujis and MacAllister's (2011) studies. Here, they suggested whilst policymakers sought rapid turnaround, it took longer to achieve and as Hutchings and Francis (2018) stated, be externally recognised and shared. Moreover, including such detail could be said to reflect Adonis (2012) and Courtney (2015) who found that the contextual make-up of sponsored academies more

typically reflected underachieving schools. This also agreed with NAO (2010) and Gorard (2014), who found that sponsored academies educated higher numbers of disadvantaged students than converter academies.

Another reason the inclusion of such contextual points was interesting was because such detail was not commonly referred to by participants. One exception to this was one leader, briefly in School 2. In interview, in Schools 1, 2 and 4, leaders discussed their own individual professional contexts and how it might have impacted on their role, rather than the socioeconomic context of the school. Interview participants' reference to such detail if it occurred, was in the context of their own experience as leaders rather than their perspective being dominated by socioeconomic factors. It suggested that different leaders held different perspectives not only concerning what they should prioritise, but also what they saw to be the context in which they situated their work.

8.2.4 Challenges experienced by school leaders

Data suggested leaders held different views concerning whether the priority was to develop the practice of teachers or leaders. School Leader E's response aligned with Branch, Hanushek, and Rivkin (2013) who found that whilst improving teacher practice was important, focusing on developing the practice of school leaders could be more urgent. School Leader E described how:

I need to know who you are, how you work, what makes you tick. It annoys me if I've got staff in the wrong place if it's not where their strength lies.

They:

...introduced the quality assurance process that we would use. I always refer to the middle leaders as the engine room of the school. You've got to get them really good. [You must] get those roots and foundations right.

The challenge of teacher and leader practice was further complicated by recruitment difficulties:

...you'd advertise a job, and you'd get maybe one, maybe two applicants. But that was it, nothing more'. Consequently 'a lot come through [name of teacher training provider].

The perspective agreed with Clegg *et al.* (2017) and Leckie and Goldstein (2018) who identified that experienced teachers were more likely to choose to teach in more affluent areas. Moreover, OECD (2019) identified that instability followed with leaders being 70% more likely to leave the school than those in more prosperous schools.

Through having inexperienced staff, MAT Leader D sought to develop teacher practice through Professional Learning Communities and instructional coaching

advocated by Markholt, Michelson and Fink (2018) and Wiliam (2018). Here, teachers worked together to plan lessons and develop subject knowledge. From MAT Leader D's point of view: 'What you want is you want a sustainable method and a sustainable model' Here, 'It's not necessarily subject knowledge, I think it's subject content. I think the staff enjoyed having that time just to talk about [name of subject]. This fitted with the experiences of MAT leaders and those in School 4 who wanted to support leaders through coaching. However, School Leader E held a different perspective. They identified with Fullan and Quinn (2015) who discussed the challenges of requiring teachers to share practice when associated with accountability through monitoring:

Our staff had been annihilated and decimated. I was used to it's going to be great, all follow me. So, I had to think about how to deal with that differently [where] we're seeing it warts and all.

This perspective also agreed with Davies (2018) who highlighted a leadership misconception that all teachers saw the need to improve their existing practice. School Leader E also identified wider considerations for improvement in that their role caused them to prioritize establishing a model for Primary to Secondary Transition:

The students arrived in September, and it was just a mess. None of them were routinised, they didn't know what they were doing, uniform was all over the place, it just didn't function very well at all.

School Leader E therefore prioritised Year 6 induction: 'We did the fire drills, assemblies, behaviour expectations. Everything. Absolutely everything'. This suggested that planning for the longer-term sustainability of the academy was important to the leader.

8.2.5 Strategies adopted by school leaders

Andrews *et al.* (2017) and Hutchings and Francis (2017; 2018) reported a lack of evidence detailing how schools or more widely, MATs brought about improvement, particularly in disadvantaged communities. Documents 2 and 8 however, gave some insight into the approaches adopted by individual leaders on some aspects of the school's journey. In Document 2, one leader focused on highlighting the importance of a strong school culture:

Too many behaviour systems are set up around dealing with the naughtiest child rather than dealing with everybody else. So, our behaviour system is there to protect and encourage the overwhelming majority of students who all day, every day get it 100% right.

This agreed with narrated content in Document 8. Here, the writer identified that:

...low-level behavioural issues that were causing disruption and taking teachers' focus away from teaching. With [name of MAT's] support, [name of Headteacher] took a firm stance on behaviour, (Document 8).

In practice, it meant 'raising expectations, getting behaviour sorted and putting in place support, including professional development' (Document 8). These perspectives mirrored those MAT leaders and School 4 concerning the importance of establishing a strong culture. However, the writers of the documents did not elaborate further on the practical contribution of MAT leaders in terms of what such support looked like in practice. The significance of the role of the MAT, fitted with Greany (2018) who stated that a strong central team was important in supporting underperforming schools. Yet the absence of detail also agreed with Chapman and Mujis (2013) and Chapman (2013; 2015) who showed that much of what we currently know about the impact of MATs and how they work, was limited. Moreover, Chapman (2013) also noted that research which did exist was restricted through being commissioned by government or perhaps, as was evident in Document 6, MATs trying to self-evaluate.

Another strategy referred to in the document was to extend the school day 'so that, on average, students are in school for 90 minutes longer. Much of that extra time is spent on maths and literacy', (Document 2). At the same time though, 'it's much

more difficult if you're not learning all the time. So, what's the point of having that longer school day if you're going to waste an hour of it dealing with behaviour issues?', (Document 2). This agreed with literature (Whelan, 2009; Mourshed, Chijioke and Barber, 2010; Garner, 2014; Gibb, 2015) who all advocated the benefit of extending the school day.

8.2.6 The role of the school leader

There was also evidence that leaders participated in loose-knit communities discussed by Bauman (2008). Leaders suggested that this had a strong impact on their practice in their current context. School Leader A named School 1 as an important part of their motivation for their own role elsewhere. They reported that:

I had seen schools go through it, schools come out the other side, schools improve you know, in places like [School 1] and [name of MAT school] ...lots of schools where you go from the lowest point, and it gets better'.

This highlighted the influence of school leaders interviewed having a strong identity with their own school but also feeling a strong connection to communities that they participated in more widely across the MAT. The point was strengthened by School Leader J who had worked in School 1 and then moved to School 4, 'I knew what we were trying to do was achievable. I knew that it was possible. I went through the

process in my old school'. This provided an interesting thread for discussion; how leaders were not only retained by the MAT by moving between contexts but also, how they then went on to approach new roles with confidence. A potential contrast with literature (Leckie and Goldstein, 2018; OECD, 2019) also emerged in that struggling schools were typically led by inexperienced leaders who might not be trained in challenging underperformance and that leaders in the same context struggled to recruit teachers and leaders.

8.2.7 How the data contributed to answering the research questions

This section summarised the ways in which the literature, interview and documentary data explored in School 1 discussed in the previous sections helped to answer research question 1.

RQ1: How did the leaders in the sponsored academies perceive and enact their roles in school improvement?

Leaders' stories and details in documents indicated that leaders in School 1 each held different perspectives concerning the context of the school. One explanation could be that the purpose of the document was different to that of the narrative intention of interviewees. Additionally, it might be that leaders did not dwell in interview on contextual data as they might have spoken on the assumption that I,

as an insider would be aware of the information. On the other hand, it could be that leaders interviewed simply held different priorities for improvement.

Leaders in both documents and interview however cited that improvement took time to embed. It concurred with Andrews *et al.* (2017) who found that an improvement in student outcomes in sponsored academies was most visible 3 years after joining the MAT. Despite challenges, leaders believed in and were motivated by the positive changes they could make to the school. In some cases, this was based on prior experiences from roles held elsewhere in the MAT.

In line with MAT leaders, those interviewed in School 1 identified different challenges depending on their role. Pertinent to this, was detail concerning approaches taken towards improving student culture as a means for improving student outcomes. These approaches related to increasing expectations and engagement with professional development. They indicated that whilst leaders were keen to address persistent issues with behaviour and outcomes, they also aligned with an interest in developing the practice of teachers through instructional leadership techniques.

8.3 School 2 Analysis

8.3.1 Introduction

School 1 focused on the role of the school leader. Interviews and documentary data raised questions about school leaders' perspectives on context, variation in challenges experienced by school leaders and the idea that leaders could have held more than one role in the MAT. Questions arose concerning how the MAT recruited and retained its leaders and whether leaders approached their roles with confidence as McAleavy and Riggall (2016) had suggested it might not always be the case. This will be considered further in School 2. The chapter explores key themes that emerged from the data, with an analysis of:

- Leaders' perceptions of context
- Leaders' motivations
- Leadership focus
- Instructional leadership
- Support from leaders in the MAT.

The school leaders all belonged to one school. This was a different school to those included in School 1. In contrast to the school in School 1, the school joined the MAT after 2010. It was a large secondary school with a long history in the local community. The school was situated within a city centre context. It had, prior to

joining the MAT struggled to sustain improvement. It had publicly suffered from controversy, and staffing and safety challenges. The proportion of students eligible for Free School Meals was higher than the national average, students spoke multiple languages and student movement during the school year was above average. When the school joined the MAT, the school's name was changed. The school went on to achieve the highest Ofsted outcome in comparison to 5 previous inspections undertaken since 2000.

8.3.2 Context of School 2

3 leaders were interviewed in this school. 2 leaders worked in another MAT role previously and the third leader came from a school outside of the MAT. None of the participants interviewed were employed by the predecessor school. The document included in the analysis was:

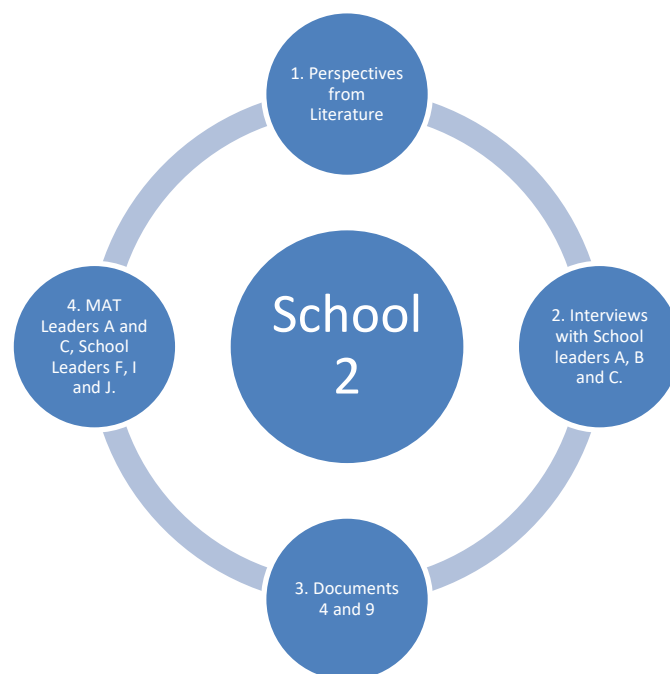
- Document 4: a blog to explore how the MAT retained employees. One leader cited in the document was an interview participant.

The literature that related to Circle 1 discussed the ways in which leaders created meaning from their school context at the start of the school improvement journey and the ways this could be supported by the MAT. It also considered the complexity of leading change and the range of leadership practices adopted. It was significant

as leaders' perspectives aligned with literature (Leithwood, Harris and Strauss, 2010; Greany, 2018; OFSTED, 2018) which identified the immediate need to stem the decline in the struggling school.

Perspectives relatable to those interviewed were noted in Figure 13, Circle 4:

Figure 13: Aspects of literature and data used to tell leaders' stories in School 2



8.3.3 Leaders' perceptions of context

When considering what leaders focused on, literature (DeRue and Ashford, 2010; Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2019; Chapman, 2019) suggested that context mattered. Likewise, in School 1, leaders' description of school context differed.

Leaders described what they had heard, read or individually experienced about the school. School Leader A explained how the school: 'had been at the bottom of the league table for many years and it had been through a major national, financial scandal' and 'we had a lot of really great, ambitious but totally frazzled young staff who had just seen their dreams break down before them'.

School Leader B agreed: 'We needed to fix not behaviour, but the ways teachers were dealing with behaviour'. Raising expectations: 'I spent the first month interrupting conversations and making students tuck their shirts in and do their buttons up'. School Leader A also explained that:

... exclusions were through the roof but were clearly not being very effective.

I was their fifth headteacher [in five years]. It was a perfect storm.

These perspectives reflected the philosophical position (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz, 2014; Baghrarian, 2015) that leaders constructed and articulated their sense of being in their school environment from within their immediate context.

8.3.4 Leadership Motivations

Leaders had a variety of motivations for wanting to work in the turnaround context of School 2. School Leader A explained: 'I didn't want to be anywhere else!'. Document 4 elaborated that School Leader A 'wanted to [be] root[ed] in one school

community', (Document 4), one 'that needed the most work'. This echoed School Leader J: 'I knew what we were trying to do was achievable. I knew that it was possible'. It suggested leaders as Baghramian (2015) explained, used their experience, personal in nature and closely linked to their own belief systems to construct meaning. People's stories were valued in this context and related to the purpose of the study which was to explore school and MAT leaders' stories in leading change within sponsored academies.

This view was further supported by Weiss *et al.* (1995) who suggested that people's stories and experiences mattered when enacting complex, social change. School Leader B stated: 'It wasn't nailed on that it was going to go well. There was a decent amount of risk'. Such an approach was not limited to 'insiders' to the MAT. School Leader C stated:

I've never worked in a school like this. I came from an established, outstanding school with pupils of similar intake to here, where you were buying into systems that already existed.

In this context however: 'The pupils were probably the one constant'. These views fitted with Fullan (2001) who noted the 'accompanying messiness' associated with change. What was interesting in the context of School 2 though, was that leaders were motivated by the challenging school context and approached it with confidence. This contrasted with Clegg *et al.* (2017) and Leckie and Goldstein (2018)

who found that leaders were reluctant to take up posts in struggling schools. More broadly though, the confidence described by these participants for joining the challenging context of their school were potentially limited to these single examples which could be further narrowed to those willing to share their stories.

8.3.5 Leadership Focus

In leading change, Beer and Nohria (2000), identified that clarity mattered. For School Leader A, it meant using assemblies and improving the facilities: 'I wanted to make it really clear that I had really high expectations for the pupils and that we needed to have high expectations of ourselves too'. One example was: 'the toilets...a horrible sign of a completely defunct, dysfunctional culture and so even though we didn't have any money and even though the school was about to be knocked down, we renovated the toilets over the Christmas holidays.' Reynolds *et al.*, (2002) noted the fabric of the school as being one of several factors to be considered in an improvement model. Whilst Weiss (1995) found that clarity concerning purpose, action and intended outcome should be secured collectively and methodically when evaluating the leadership of change. However, not all leaders recalled the same priorities which suggested that not all leaders focused on the same thing.

In contrast to School Leader A, School Leader C recalled: 'we all had to read this thing and [have] a discussion about it...which maybe is a big point of difference; that

[name of Principal] has made a big effort to foster a kind of team culture and to focus on candour.' This reflected Yukl (1999) who described how a transformational approach challenged beliefs on a deeper, less tangible level, appealing to emotions and principles. In turn, Waldman, Galvin and Walumbwa (2012) identified, this sought to motivate people to go above and beyond and as studies (Yukl, 1999; Bass and Riggio, 2008; Jackson and Parry, 2011) showed, act for the benefit of the organisation, rather than themselves.

Leaders observed that clarity in approach then extended to the wider culture of the school. School Leader A stated that: 'the staff values, the candour and rigour stuff was something that was just necessary [and] it's become part of the way we do things.' School Leaders B and C agreed: 'there was a very explicit demand for feedback and wanting to respond and change', because 'we wanted to build that tell me what I can do better, kind of culture'. This suggested a combined use of leadership styles reflecting more recent literature (Gronn, 2010; Robinson, 2011; Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2019) which found that individual leadership styles became less important. Here, Hopkins (2013) and Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins (2019) showed that leaders drew upon a range of leadership practices in response to the demands of the context.

Another example of where clarity was important was in the choice to limit what leaders focused on. Fullan (2001) found that leaders trying to do too much risked

planning lacking depth. As such, School Leader B stated: 'we focused in on a few things that we think are really, really important for transforming learning'. Initially, 'we make climate the thing'. This reflected views from other participants interviewed in different roles. MAT Leader A stated: 'focus is fundamental in school improvement'. As such, School Leader F noted: 'You've got to just choose two or three things and stick to them', (School Leader F).

Finally, studies (Leithwood, Harris and Strauss, 2010; Greany, 2018; OFSTED, 2018) showed that early priorities were likely to focus on halting the decline. School Leader C stated that: 'to sweat the small stuff, you have to kind of let some of it go'. As such, School Leader A noted: 'in the first six months it was very difficult to think beyond strong discipline'. As such: 'we had to codify our basic expectations, our basic routines in each of our different areas' because 'we don't want to lose sight of the fact that, just doing the essentials really well is so important'.

8.3.6 Instructional Leadership

Interview data suggested that leaders engaged in instructional leadership to improve teacher practice. School Leader B described how:

We'll have close comparatives like what's the very subtle, but important difference between the two things. And I think that's how you shift people's understanding.

The language concerning how leaders 'shift people's understandings' was like that of MAT Leader A who also cited the importance of using examples when coaching teachers, alongside the authors of Document 9. Here, they described that 'looking at what the best teachers do and codifying it so that others can assimilate it quickly in training', (Document 9). They considered: 'What, exactly, are our most effective people doing, both in the classroom and in leadership moments?', (Document 9). The document concurred with Lemov (2015, p.4) who sought to put 'names on techniques in the interest of helping create a common vocabulary to analyse and discuss the classroom'. This also enabled not just the Principal to be close to the daily practice of the school but as research (Creemers and Kyriakides, 2008; CUREE, 2009; OECD, 2014) indicated, a range of leaders within the MAT.

Data and literature (Danielson, 2006; Markholt, Michelson and Fink, 2018) agreed that one of the challenges associated with instructional leadership was that leaders struggled to accurately identify how a teacher needed to improve or have the time to be able to do this. MAT Leader A's reflection concerning the context of School 2 explained how it was 'a good example of the turnaround school' because as a MAT leader 'it is hard to shift someone's practice if you are just the outsider coming in',

and 'if you're going to take on schools, you have to offer them something'. To some extent, the view agreed with School Leader C. Here, they sought to improve teaching by focusing on lesson planning: 'the biggest change has been the key learning, thinking precisely about what you're teaching and the sequencing of it'. School Leader A agreed: '[name of subject] was in a good position because it had [name of MAT curriculum] and I just got subjects to align with the MAT where that existed'. However, School Leader B, in line with MAT Leader A's view was that: 'we were limited by not always knowing what great looked like'. School Leader A noted: 'lots of teachers who have never seen anything else and can't imagine what better looks like'.

8.3.7 Support from leaders in the MAT

Leaders held different perspectives about what support from the MAT looked like in practice. School Leader A first identified how: 'you've got a whole team of people; the Projects Team who are doing a lot of the logistical stuff', because the school building was being re-built. Afterwards, School Leader A felt that leaders benefitted from being able to collaborate in a close-knit community (Bauman, 2008) of practice between the school and neighbouring MAT schools: 'I'm not reinventing any wheels and I haven't got time to'. School Leader B however described support with initial teacher training: 'we've got loads of trainees and I think that we're lucky [Name of

Principal] has deep relationships and was able to get on the phone'. Clegg *et al.* (2017) claimed that struggling schools employed inexperienced teachers. However, School Leader B stated that in practice the MAT relationship extended to: 'lots of extra support. We didn't have the capacity to [train others]'. These viewpoints contributed towards an issue identified in literature (Hill *et al.*, 2012; Salokangas and Chapman, 2014; Andrews *et al.*, 2017; Hutchings and Francis, 2017; Papanastasiou, 2017; Greany, 2018; OFSTED, 2019) that little remained known about how MATs influence their schools through practical examples.

Furthermore, School Leader B stated: 'We [also] had MAT leads in [names of subjects]' and [name of PD MAT leader] came and visited me and talked about priorities'. On the other hand, School Leader C identified how: 'the pooling of stuff has been useful like I went on curriculum briefings' along with 'the amount of data you have, the more centralization you can do'. This suggested that support for leaders from the MAT extended beyond instructional coaching. It could also further contribute to our understanding of the range of loose-knit communities explained by Bauman (2008) in that such communities existed in terms of leadership activity, rather than being limited by role.

8.3.8 How the data contributed to answering the research questions

RQ1: How did the leaders in the sponsored academies perceive and enact their roles in school improvement?

Participant responses indicated that contextual information meant different things to different leaders. In School 2, it was concerned with what leaders had initially seen, heard or individually experienced. This was interesting as it reflected the philosophical position (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz, 2014; Baghranian, 2015) that leaders constructed their sense of being from their immediate context.

Leaders' perspectives here, were also interesting because they believed in and were motivated by the positive changes they could make to the school. While it could be said to be limited to the experiences of those leaders interviewed, their viewpoint highlighted that not all leaders were uncomfortable with what Fullan (2001) described as the 'accompanying messiness' associated with complex social change. This was interesting as it raised a question concerning whether this was confined to these leaders or also experienced by other leaders elsewhere.

Moreover, leaders used their roles to either establish or discuss the importance of creating a transparent culture with the school community of staff, parents, and students (Reynolds, Potter and Chapman, 2001). It fitted with Beer and Nohria (2000) who identified that clarity mattered. The clear focus identified by those leaders interviewed, on addressing a limited number of issues at any one time in the school

also concurred with Fullan (2001) who showed that having multiple priorities risked planning lacking depth.

Additionally, leaders' experiences of change in teaching and learning aligned with literature in that they did not always know how to develop teacher practice. Their experiences agreed with Danielson (2006) and Markholt, Michelson and Fink (2018). This was interesting as the sponsored academy in a MAT is a relatively new research context. Exploring the issue with other leaders may develop the insight further.

RQ3: How did the roles of the school leader and the leader(s) from the MAT interact in relation to school improvement in the MAT?

MAT leaders perceived that it was important to develop strong relationships with school leaders when supporting them in schools. It enabled leaders in the school and the MAT to benefit from a range of communities. These included those focused on improving teaching practice as well as operational support. MAT Leader A particularly identified School 2 as an example of the importance of MAT leaders having specific tools or techniques that could be used to support school leaders. These ideas agreed with studies (Leithwood, Harris and Strauss, 2010; Greany, 2018; OFSTED, 2018) which found that early priorities were likely to focus on halting the decline.

RQ4: What can be learned about the leadership of school improvement from the common and varying experiences of leaders across the MAT in this context?

Firstly, leaders' perspectives agreed with Weiss (1995) that change within the context of their school was complex and that it was messy to enact. School Leader A described how they responded to this through transparency with teachers, leaders, students, and parents while narrowing the focus on what to change first. This was intended to bring about clarity and confidence. The idea was further underlined by leaders who believed that an important part of the school improvement journey included being focused on small steps. Other interviews from leaders will be explored to identify whether the approach was adopted more widely by other leaders in other roles in the MAT.

Additionally, interviews with leaders showed agreement with Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins (2019) whose research showed that leadership had evolved to be more concerned with leadership practices than celebrating individual style. School Leader C described how School Leader A used a transformational approach 'to foster a kind of team culture and to focus on candour'. At the same time, they were also prepared to 'to sweat the small stuff' in relation to details of school culture and the improvement of teacher practice associated with instructional leadership.

8.4 School 3 Analysis

8.4.1 Introduction

School 2 considered the ways in which school leaders approached complex change. It also explored the approaches adopted in securing support from the MAT. School 3 will further examine the introduction of the school to the MAT and the ways in which leaders prioritised actions for improvement.

The chapter combined interview data with key literature to explore key concepts around:

- Collaboration
- Leadership Priorities
- Instructional Leadership
- The role of the MAT leader.

School 3 was the most recent school to have joined the MAT in this case study. The school was described as having experienced significant change. It had increased substantially in size. It was the largest of the 4 schools in the study and had previously operated under a different MAT, prior to joining the MAT that was the focus of the research. Like other schools in the study, the number of pupils eligible

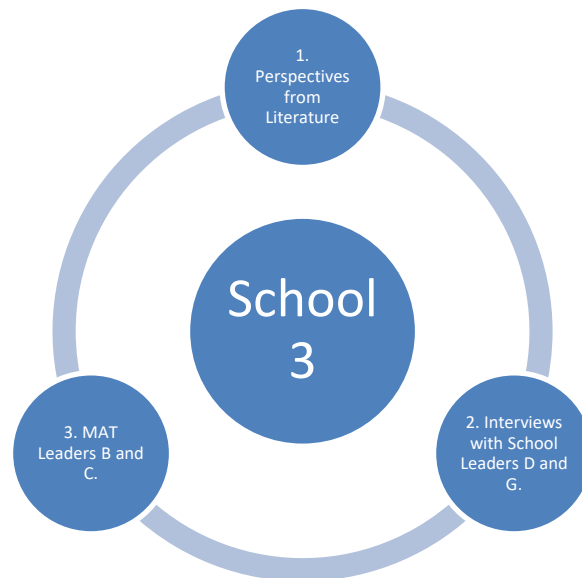
for Free School Meals was above average and the school was situated in an area of socioeconomic disadvantage.

8.4.2 Context of School 3

5 leaders had supported or led in School 3. 1 out of the 5 participants was employed by their predecessor school, prior to the school joining the MAT. The analysis refers to documentary data to illuminate the discussion, rather than documents being directly related to the school. MAT Leaders B and C held perspectives that reflected the experiences of those in the school. These are noted in Figure 14, Circle 3.

The literature which related to Circle 1 in School 3 considered the role of the MAT in context of loose-knit communities (Bauman, 2008) along with the ways in which teachers could collaborate to share practice (Markholt, Michelson and Fink (2018). Furthermore, literature (Clegg *et al.*, 2017; Leckie and Goldstein, 2018; OECD, 2019) pertaining to teacher recruitment and the complexity of change (Fullan, 2001) was also explored. Combined with interview data, this enabled the role of leaders in implementing change to be studied further.

Figure 14: Aspects of literature and data used to tell leaders' stories in School 3



8.4.3 Collaboration

Similarly, to other leaders interviewed, participants agreed with the benefits of what Bauman (2008) identified as a loose-knit community which in this context, supported school improvement. School Leader D cited: 'we've got other schools very close by where we can draw upon other people's experience'. The focus here, for the leader centred around curriculum: 'now that we've started the new content on the new specifications it's really reassuring to know that there are other schools in the region'. Adnett and Davies (2010) and Wiliam (2018) stated that collaboration between individuals could support the development of a professional culture focused on sharing knowledge.

MAT Leaders interviewed across Phases 1 and 2 suggested that curriculum models and lesson planning sat within instructional leadership. This was important in supporting school leaders. In interview, School Leader D drew comparisons with the previous MAT, which the school opened: 'In our previous MAT, it was always smaller teams because there used to be one Art teacher for example, and then when you moderated, there would be four Art teachers in total'.

8.4.4 Leadership Priorities

Interview data for this school revealed that leaders had different priorities. Whilst School Leader D perceived that GCSE subject content was important for teachers to learn, School Leader G initially focused on how the PE curriculum might be used to support issues concerning students' longer term health prospects. Taking a nested and then phased approach further revealed differences in ideas. Here, School Leader G described how they explored: 'statistics and mapping for deprivation levels, what the housing is like, what the environment is like' which meant that: 'part of the changes that I made [were influenced by] incredibly high levels of diabetes in the area, so the PE curriculum is more about healthy lifestyles'. Fullan (2007) found that there was an absence of a single model for school improvement. This reflected the perspective of one MAT executive who stated that: 'There are no silver bullets in education', (Document 6, p.7).

Moreover, School Leader G had led in schools 3 and 4. This was interesting because it highlighted an emergent theme of the MAT retaining and indeed, redeploying leaders across schools or roles across the MAT. This contrasted with literature (Clegg *et al.*, 2017; Leckie and Goldstein, 2018; OECD, 2019) which indicated that struggling schools found it difficult to retain leaders or experienced teachers. Indeed, this data suggested that experienced leaders chose to remain in less affluent areas and felt able to challenge poor teaching (McAlevay and Riggall, 2016).

Another example of variation in leaders' perceptions involved how to manage change. School Leader D mentioned that: 'it hasn't felt like there's too much change at one time' and in context of the community: 'I would say they haven't really felt a change'. School Leader G however shared: 'a group of staff felt disenfranchised. [There was] a collection of very inexperienced teachers. Lots of teachers that had been drafted in because nobody wants to come to the school'. Despite this, School Leader G stated: 'that layer of agency teacher is your first layer that you remove' because if you can organise the 'efficiency of the timetable, you can remove the numbers of inadequate sessions being taught'. These contrasting perceptions concurred with Weiss (1995) and Weiss *et al.* (1995) who suggested that identifying impact when enacting complex social change programmes could be challenging and that as Fullan (2001) stated, opinion varied concerning how change should happen.

Different opinion concerning change was also reflected in leaders' views of staff retention. For School Leader D: 'staff are still here you know, and that's a big thing'. Ofsted (2017) typified the challenges of retaining staff in the struggling school context. However, for School Leader G, training was a priority: 'knowing what I know from [previous school], upskilling the teachers that we've got, so they know the expectations in terms of behaviour and to give them some...some clear systems.' It was apparent that different leaders working in the same school had different perspectives in terms of the importance of retaining staff. It might be that one explanation was that School Leader G had adopted the position of the 'insider-outsider' as they had moved from the school in School 4 to School 3. This also suggested the 'insider-outsider' perspective was not limited to MAT leaders. It was also evident in the experience of school leaders moving between schools to support school improvement.

8.4.5 Instructional Leadership

Clarity and transparency were used to improve teacher practice. School Leader G described: 'The first thing that I did was set a very clear routine with 'a why' on how to enter a classroom lesson'. It evolved into a wider leadership development activity because 'my senior leadership team hadn't worked at that level of detail [before]'. The point of view was supported by MAT Leader B who identified that, 'you have to

get the culture right before you can actually teach. [Then] the rigour, the academic trajectory can then come into play'. In this context, the School Leader identified culture as being related to developing students' academic strength (Gibb, 2015) which supported Pike (2009) and Golan (2015). They stated that such approaches were adopted in the belief that improvements would translate into student outcomes over time.

MAT Leader B went on to describe how: 'We spent a lot of time working on explanations. We've worked on modelling'. MAT Leader C offered an explanation. Here, they identified a senior MAT leader, featured in Documents 2 and 9 focused on working with school leaders to improve teacher practice. They were 'making it people's priority on their timetables [and] providing the model and giving people opportunities to practice'. It reflected the idea that at MAT level, where operational support was centralized, economies of scale benefited schools because as OFSTED (2019) stated, leaders were more able to focus on instructional leadership.

8.4.6 The role of the MAT leader

Given that the MAT leader role could reasonably be said to have only existed since policy inception in 2002, it could also be said that the role may not be well understood. Where school leaders had only recently joined a MAT, School Leader D advised that even less was understood by school leaders:

I understand that whilst there are subject leads or network leads, those people are also probably full-time teaching members of staff or middle leaders or senior leaders who are probably doing this alongside their day job and that can be quite cumbersome.

However, 'our Head of [subject] had the Network Lead [MAT Leader] come every week'. School Leader G stated: 'lots of experts and people who can be drafted in'. This also supported the view of other school leaders who perceived that the MAT Leader role helped them to bring about improvement. Greany (2018) suggested that lead academies might codify processes to roll out to other MAT schools. In the context of the MAT, it could be that the approach was not limited to the sharing of teacher practice but was employed more laterally to enable leaders to be deployed between schools to support improvement.

8.4.7 How the data contributed to answering the research questions

RQ1: How did the leaders in the sponsored academies perceive and enact their roles in school improvement?

Leaders held different perspectives concerning priorities for improvement and what to focus on first. In School 3, one leader reflected on the needs of the school community and sought to adapt aspects of the school curriculum. This mirrored the experiences of school leaders interviewed in School 2 and echoed Fullan (2007) who

identified that there was no single model for school improvement. Furthermore, Weiss (1995) and Weiss *et al.* (1995) noted that leading social change was complex, one leader perceived that it had been manageable as the MAT had engaged with the school early in the process of seeking sponsorship.

RQ3: How did the roles of the school leader and the leader(s) from the MAT interact in relation to school improvement in the MAT?

Leaders cited the benefits of being able to work within loose-knit communities (Bauman, 2008) across schools. They identified the role of the MAT in creating collaborative opportunities for teachers and leaders to work together to improve instructional practices. These opportunities included coaching, moderation of work and regular, collaborative planning. Wiliam (2018) noted the importance of teachers being able to plan together through professional learning communities focused on formative assessment.

RQ4: What can be learned about the leadership of school improvement from the common and varying experiences of leaders across the MAT in this context?

One leader had worked in another MAT school and had intentionally chosen to move to School 3. It enabled them to approach the leadership of change with confidence. This suggested an emergent picture across participants and gave an insight into two key ideas from research, in practice. These were that leaders in schools in challenging circumstances lacked the training to challenge poor teaching through being inexperienced (McAleavy and Riggall, 2016) and that the ways in

which a MAT influences its schools remains relatively under-researched (Hill *et al.*, 2012; Salokangas and Chapman, 2014; Andrews *et al.*, 2017; Hutchings and Francis, 2017; Papanastasiou, 2017; Greany, 2018; OFSTED, 2019).

8.5 School 4 Analysis

8.5.1 Introduction

School 3 explored key ideas concerning leaders' varied perspectives regarding priorities for change. It also considered the experiences of leaders who had participated in professional learning communities across the MAT and the emergent idea that leaders intentionally moved between roles and schools in the MAT. School 4 will further examine interview data with key literature to discuss:

- Leadership priorities
- Leadership challenges
- Leadership strategies
- Improving teacher practice.

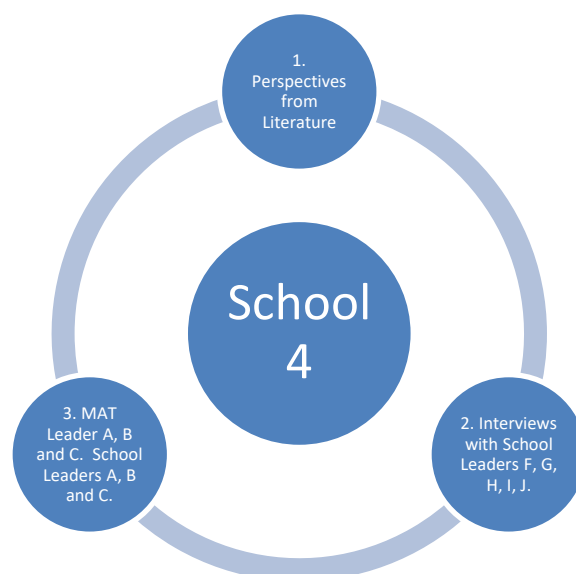
School 4 was one of the most recent to have joined the MAT in the study. This was a large secondary school with a lengthy history in its local community. It had endured changes to MAT leadership immediately prior to joining the MAT. The school had publicly suffered from controversy, falling pupil numbers and high staff turnover. Similarly, to the other schools explored in this study, there was an above average intake of pupils eligible for Free School Meals. The school was situated near to a city centre, located in an area of high socioeconomic disadvantage. When the school joined the MAT, the school's name was changed. The school went on to achieve a 'Good' grading in inspection; the highest for a number of years.

8.5.2 Context of School 4

5 leaders had supported or led in School 4. 1 of the participants was employed by the predecessor school. Data did not include documentary information.

The literature which related to Circle 1 in School 4 considered the complexities of managing change (Weiss *et al.*, 1995) and the idea that little remains known about the actions school leaders take in leading such change (Eyles *et al.*, 2017). The ways in which leaders motivated their staff was also considered along with studies (Bass and Riggio, 2008; Robinson, 2011; Diamond and Spillane, 2016; Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2019) which identified the need for a greater focus on leadership practice rather than individual style. Where other school or MAT leaders' experiences were related to those in School 4, they are noted in Figure 15, Circle 3.

Figure 15: Aspects of literature and data used to tell leaders' stories in School 4



8.5.3 Leadership Priorities

Leaders interviewed cited that structure was important in effecting change. They differed though, in what those structures focused on. School Leader F stated: 'It was dysfunctional. The students didn't really understand structure and it was more control than teaching', as 'there were no systems'. This reflected the challenges experienced by School Leader B in School 2. Here, they identified how they 'make climate the thing', because as School Leader J stated: 'we need to get our routines right, to think about threshold, how students are entering and exiting the classroom'. As such, 'we needed to make sure students knew what they were doing and when they were doing it'. School Leader G added that there was 'an old, tired learning environment' and as School Leader J noted: 'chaotic, pretty much rock bottom', atmosphere. School Leader H identified how they wanted to secure clarity because: 'teachers didn't know what the message was...some had [name of original school], others had the message of [previous trust sponsored academy]. They were all saying different things. I needed everyone to use the same words.'

These perspectives highlighted the complexity of managing change (Fullan, 2001). They also reflected Ball (2003) who found that in such challenging situations, it is difficult for leaders to isolate what to focus on first. The data gave some practical insight into the idea that less was known about the actions taken to improve a school's situation (Hopkins and Lagerweij in Reynolds *et al.*, 1996; Eyles *et al.*, 2017). These insights could also, by extension, add to Andrews *et al.* (2017) who stated that

it took a minimum of two years and up to five to seven years (MacBeath *et al.*, 2007), for change in schools to be reflected in student outcomes. The complexity of change in the school further added to existing research (Keddie, 2015; Hutching and Francis, 2018; Leckie and Goldstein, 2018) which considered why converter academies had grown at a more rapid rate than schools in need of sponsorship.

8.5.4 Leadership Challenges

In addition to trying to isolate key priorities, School Leader I stated: 'there was a lot of panic about the unknown...there were a lot of people talking about preconceived notion of what [name of MAT] was like and how they operated'. Whilst 'it felt very alien', these concerns were juxtaposed with 'the teaching and learning. That was awesome'. Here, 'the stuff that we were doing around the teacher toolkit and the Doug Lemov stuff...it's kind of like two different things because all that was really exciting'. In line with Ball (2003) this gave an insight into the conflict and anxiety experienced by individuals in the struggling school context.

In addition, School Leader I's reference to a published work used by MAT leaders in training mirrored the experiences of other leaders. It also fitted with Greany (2018) who suggested that lead academies might codify processes to roll out to other MAT schools. However, this could also highlight other perspectives in literature (Hill *et al.*, 2012; OFSTED, 2016; Greany, 2018) which found that little was known about the

distinctive features of MATs that are claimed to be successful. As such, this study could make some contribution towards the gap.

Commonality on the other hand, existed between leaders who experienced difficulties recruiting staff. School Leader H stated: 'recruitment was incredibly hard' while School Leader I commented on how: 'the turnover was immense...that was really hard'. The impact was: 'I thought I was going to see the team [on induction] but then I was asked if I could interview instead'. School Leader J went on to say: 'we were unsure, we just needed someone to take hold of things.' Like School Leader A School 2, School Leader G saw a range of staff experiencing different difficulties:

... what I saw was a group of teachers who had been in the academy for several years and were worried and concerned and had extremely weak morale. I saw a group of new teachers who knew nothing about it and a group of supply teachers, a huge amount of uncertainty.

The need to be transparent with staff emerged in School 2, but here, there was a focus on all members of the school community. School Leader H prioritised building trust with the local community: 'I had to show the parents that they could come and be open with us about everything that was on their minds. I also had to show them that things were changing'. School Leader J explained that in building relationships with staff, they had to be 'totally transparent. I've had several conversations with people where I've said, 'look it's just not good enough'. School Leader H elaborated:

'you might as well face what is happening now than wait for issues to pile up'. These experiences reflected Yukl (1999) and Waldman, Galvin and Walumbwa (2012) who identified the importance of a transformational approach to challenge beliefs on a deeper, less tangible level. In this context, with the purpose being as studies (Yukl, 1999; Bass and Riggio, 2008; Jackson and Parry, 2011) showed, to act for the benefit of the organisation, rather than themselves. It also reflected literature (Hopkins, 2013; Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2019) which found that leaders drew upon a range of leadership practice in response to the context in which they were leading.

8.5.5 Leadership Strategies

With change, questions concerning identity arose. School Leader I noted: 'you notice that there are certain [name of MAT]-isms aren't there'. Gorard (2014) identified that a new school name, buildings, governance and financial support were indicators of change. These ideas were significant in the context of the school, where School Leader I said:

...it's not the same school because the school isn't the building. The school is the people, and the people weren't the same people. It was completely different. We had a massive staff turn-over, so it was a brand, new start. And the only thing that remained constant, was the kids.

The idea of the children providing the stability was also experienced by School Leader C. When considering identity, However, School Leader H referred to identity in the context of the inspectorate:

Ofsted is a language that everyone understands, parents, community, children, staff and other schools. Once this is secured, everyone can see that things are changing. They trust you. They start to see it.

Leaders also managed change through the development of curriculum models. Upon arrival, School Leader J stated: '[teachers] were just teaching whatever they wanted', supported by School Leader F: 'there was nothing'. This reflected theoretical perspectives which identified that in some contexts, leaders selected agreed approaches (Reynolds, Potter and Chapman, 2001; Angrist *et al.*, 2012). Here, leaders described how the MAT supported them: 'we worked with the MAT leaders into the [name of MAT Curriculum] because I knew that it would be mapped correctly' (School Leader J). Whereas School Leader G noted: 'if there was a successful curriculum [from the MAT], we could have worked with the teachers to deliver that curriculum. However, what we had was a middle leadership trying to design and devise their own curriculum which they effectively didn't have the skill, knowledge or understanding to be able to do effectively'. It suggested that where MAT-wide approaches were available, these were valued by school and MAT leaders alike in the struggling school context and these were seen to provide clarity.

8.5.6 Improving teacher practice

Analysis of data suggested that specific approaches to developing teacher practice were evident in coaching and mentoring. School Leader J stated: 'I spent time coaching them, talking to them...scripting... how to do data analysis. I sat and did it with them'. This fitted with the importance of using examples, discussed by leaders in School 2 and the MAT. School Leader J further noted:

...you've got to model it. I treat everything the way we treat our students. We don't just say 'right, write this essay'. You model it, you show them a good example then do a little bit together.

School Leader G then placed the idea of models in a broader context which fitted with MAT Leader A's experience. They said: 'it's just that they've never been shown, and they haven't seen what this looks like'. The methods indicated a range of participants who shared similar experiences concerning the importance of transparency and an interest in instructional leadership in school improvement. They concurred with literature (Bass and Riggio, 2008; Robinson, 2011; Diamond and Spillane, 2016; Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2019) which suggested that there was less focus on the actions of individuals, particularly the variable influence of the charismatic leader often associated with transformational leadership. It also reflected MAT-wide interest in teacher improvement, associated with large-scale corporate philanthropy discussed in Chapter 2.

Finally, underpinning the approaches to change, in line with Beer and Nohria (2000) and Fullan (2001), participants identified the need for focus in the development of teacher practice. Here School Leader F explained: 'Your plan can't be a list of ten things. You've got to choose two and stick to them'. School Leader F also commented there was: 'one target that first year and that was climate. We spent a whole year on that.' This agreed with MAT Leader B's experience of supporting practice in School 4: 'we've got to break the model down into steps and then just focus on a little bit each week.' It suggested that in this context, leaders narrowed their focus for change and used standardized instructional approaches where they existed, alongside a transformative approach.

This concurred with research (Gronn, 2010; Robinson, 2011; Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2019) which found more recently that leadership practice, rather than individual style has emerged as more relevant in leading change. The view was reflected by School Leader H who said that: 'we have a particular way of doing things.' School Leader I mirrored this: 'I've never experienced that before, that level of absolute clarity over purpose'. The experience was also in line with literature (Hargreaves, 2010; Hopkins, 2013; Chapman, 2019) moving away from 'one size fits all'. Instead, adopting a blend of approaches appropriate to the school context, extended to suggest that such a fusion, did not signify a lack of clarity.

8.5.7 How the data contributed to answering the research questions

RQ1: How did the leaders in the sponsored academies perceive and enact their roles in school improvement?

Leaders perceived that bringing structure to the daily operations of the school was important in leading complex change. They did not however, identify the same things. Leaders also had different perspectives on joining the MAT. The complexity of change they identified, as being needed could add to studies (Keddie, 2015; Hutching and Francis, 2018; Leckie and Goldstein, 2018) which considered why converter academies had grown at a more rapid rate than schools in need of sponsorship. Despite the challenges, leaders described the importance of establishing a transparent culture with the school community of staff, parents and students.

Furthermore, leaders experienced difficulties in recruiting teachers. For one participant, this impacted on their perception of their own role. More widely, they perceived that the role of standardised approaches was to give a means for supporting leaders experiencing difficulties in recruiting and training staff. The combined focus on improving teacher practice with a transformative approach explored by Yukl (1999) and Jackson and Parry (2011) reflected more recent literature (Hopkins, 2013; Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2019) which identified that leaders were more likely to require a variety of leadership practice dependent on the context in which they were leading change.

RQ4: What can be learned about the leadership of school improvement from the common and varying experiences of leaders across the MAT in this context?

In line with Beer and Nohria (2000) and Fullan (2001), leaders believed that an important part of the school improvement journey included being focused on small steps in the development of teacher practice. The sense of 'absolute clarity over purpose' experienced by School Leader I echoed the experiences of other leaders interviewed.

CHAPTER 9: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

9.1 Introduction

Chapter 8 analysed interview data with reference, where relevant, to documentary data and related perspectives. Key themes included recruitment challenges, the importance of focus and clarity when leading complex change and the perceived value of belonging to a range of professional communities within the MAT. Chapter 9 synthesises data across both phases and documents with literature to deduce findings. Leaders interviewed and featured in documents experienced similar motivations to leaders in struggling schools with challenges concerning teacher recruitment being cited in schools 1, 3 and 4. The data also indicated key points of difference which included the role of collaboration in school improvement and the use of models in instructional leadership.

9.2 Context of data

Before examining the overarching themes, a summary of the combined database across all data is provided. In Phase 1, 6 leaders were interviewed. 5 leaders worked

in 3 of the 4 schools and 1 participant was a MAT Leader. In Phase 2, 8 leaders were interviewed. 5 participants were school leaders and 3 were MAT leaders. There was an increase in MAT leaders interviewed in this phase because this role arose as a point of interest in Phase 1 interview data.

In addition, 9 documents were analysed from a range of sources. These documents were in the public domain and published at different times. They referred to the MAT or were about the MAT or academies within the MAT. These broadened the perspectives of leadership in the MAT and examined as Candappa (2017) stated, the interaction between them.

Key literature related to Circle 1 in Figure 16 which contributed to the analysis included Clegg *et al.* (2017) and Leckie and Goldstein (2018), focused on teacher recruitment. Also, studies of the London Challenge where leaders approached their school contexts as opportunities were explored (Hutchings and Masaray, 2013; Ainscow, 2015; Greany, 2017). Furthermore, literature which identified the importance of leaders adopting approaches to suit their school circumstances was considered in the context of how this study could add to the limited body of knowledge on the issue (Hopkins, 2013; Chapman, 2019). This was represented then visually in Figure 16, with Table 14 detailing the type and purpose of the documents used to give further insight into the leadership of the MAT.

Figure 16: Aspects of literature and all data used to tell leaders' stories

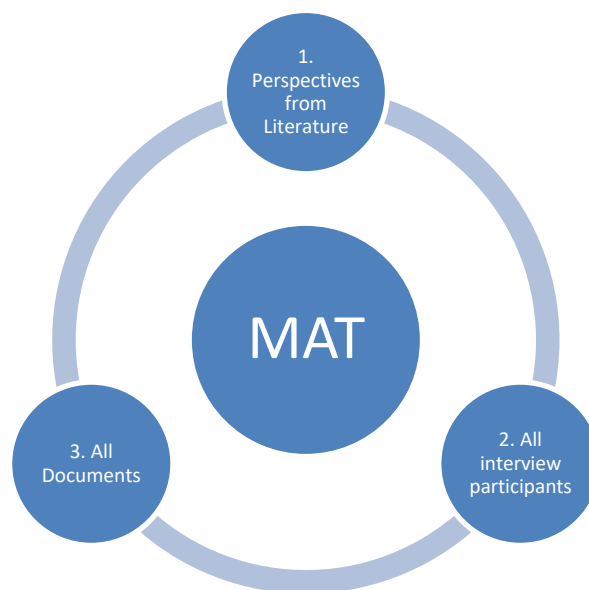


Table 14: Type and Purpose of Documents included for analysis

No.	Type of Document	Purpose of the document
1	1a. 'About Us' section (MAT website)	Inform readers of contextual information about the MAT.
	1b. 'Our Approach' section (MAT website)	
2	The Annual Report 2015 for the MAT	To summarise events in the MAT during the year 2015.
3	A blog published on the MAT website	To explore how curriculum could be created and what the teacher's role was.
4	A blog published on the MAT website	To explore how employees in the MAT were retained.
5	An extract from a book on school leadership	To describe the journey of a single school in the MAT under sponsorship.
6	A report commissioned by the MAT	To reflect on the MAT's work and wider educational context.
7	A chapter from a book on schools in England. Same school as document 5	To explore the work undertaken by one sponsored academy in the MAT.
8	A case study of the MAT	To articulate how the MAT works to improve schools.
9	An article written by 2 MAT Leaders	To articulate how leaders are using approaches learned from Charter Schools to develop leadership practices of MAT leaders working across multiple schools in the MAT.

9.3 Collaboration between leaders

In this case, creating new from old in the sponsored academy context in England, data indicated that this MAT enabled collaboration between leaders. This included shared professional development opportunities, MAT leaders working across contexts and leaders moving across the MAT over time.

Collaboration was perceived to help leaders enact change with opportunities to meet extending across physical boundaries. This was notable because the MAT was located across three diverse geographical locations in England. In two regions, School Leader D discussed how the MAT invested in developing instructional leadership practices of its school leaders: 'We get to meet the APs and the VPs across the [MAT] in [name of region]. School Leader E stated the impact: 'I'm understanding how I work' because: 'I've had the opportunity to network with people at a similar level and see how other schools' function'. School Leader H added that the MAT created opportunities for teachers across schools to collaborate in curriculum focused communities: 'sixteen teachers sitting in a room talking about their subject helps people to see that they are part of something bigger than themselves'. Their experiences agreed with Chapman (2019) and OECD (2019) who stated that leaders being able to articulate and benefit from a collaborative culture was increasingly important. Moreover, from a theoretical perspective, traditionally observed boundaries could be more flexible (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002).

The data also illustrated, in practice, Hargreaves' (2010, p.18) perspective that being able to name what leaders do enabled practice to be 'captured, codified and taught to others.' Thus, it could be suggested that the MAT was attempting to create opportunities to affect teaching practice at scale through professional communities. This presented an alternative to research (Fink and Silverman, 2014; Greany, 2017; OECD, 2019) which identified that schools and MATs were not enabling practice to be shared between schools through practical opportunities for collaboration. As such, these ideas may be of interest to those seeking to establish opportunities across schools or roles. Further research would however need to be undertaken to understand how these communities operated in practice, and whether they helped to address wider challenges, in the struggling school context, such as teacher retention.

More widely, leaders recognised that between school collaboration helped them to visualise improvement for their own context. In Document 5, schools at around eighteen months into the school's turnaround journey started 'looking outwards' (Document 5, p.227). They sought to 'eke out the small gains that could yet make a difference to a child' (Document 5, p.227). The reference to a specific timescale was interesting in that leaders interviewed did not identify with this. They perceived that being part of such opportunities was akin to belonging to the MAT. School Leader A described how: 'You have to constantly be challenged to see what's better'. This

suggested that School Leader A wanted to undertake further work on collaboration, rather than less.

The perspectives highlighted different leaders were influenced by their context and as such, had different experiences concerning the school improvement journey even within the same MAT. This aligned with Frickel, Prainsack and Albert (2017) and Chapman (2019) who found that sharing practice could encourage innovation and increased equity, leading to a more 'porous' (Chapman, 2019, p.558) environment which supported sharing ideas for the greater good. In line with the contextually driven nature of visits to other schools however, practice observed may not be easily transferrable. This could have the opposite effect on leaders in the struggling school context, who may find it difficult to know what to prioritise or value (Fullan, 2019) in their school improvement journey. Moreover, leaders did not identify examples of visits to schools outside of the MAT by way of comparison, which could inadvertently narrow leaders' experiences of school improvement in practice.

9.3.1 The 'Insider-Outsider' Perspective

Another approach to supporting collaboration between school leaders existed in the role of the MAT leader. Studies (National Audit Office, 2010; Academies Commission 2013; Gibson, 2018) have shown that MATs emerged in 2002, creating new roles in and across schools. Given the relative infancy of such roles, further exploring the perspectives of MAT leaders helped to examine them in more detail.

Participants identified the importance of prior experience for the roles. MAT Leader D stated: 'having that credibility first and foremost is really important', whilst MAT Leader A reflected: 'You need to have done it yourself to know what great looks like and have a clear idea of what it means to get better'.

Despite the limited length of time that the MAT leader role had existed, school leaders valued their contribution. School Leader G cited that the work of turnaround was: 'much easier when you've got a MAT with lots of experts and superb people that can be drafted in'. School Leader H also stated: 'The trust initially sent people who did a lot of stuff in the background....HR.... operations the kind of stuff that if it isn't being taken care of you notice but if it is, it's hard to see it happening'. This was interesting because the two perspectives showed that the MAT leader role was not limited to instructional leadership. Instead, there was a range of individuals who worked alongside the school-based leadership team. Greany (2018) identified the benefits of a MAT having a central support team and in Document 8, the writer explained how the MAT supported school leaders. A 'team of educational specialists', (Document 8, p.5) that included 'former teachers, school leaders and teacher trainers [were] brought in to support Principals and SLTs' would 'deliver professional development', (Document 8, p.5).

Another aspect of the role of the MAT leader was their position as an insider in the MAT, but to the school leader, could be an outsider looking in. This was described

by School Leader H: 'The best network leads rolled their sleeves up. They: 'added to our work; they were in sync with us.' School Leader J concurred: 'They turned up each week and said: 'what do you need us to do?'' This added to the earlier point that leaders might perceive practical help focused on improving teacher practice to be more visible than the more operational support identified by School Leader H. Additionally, the focus on individual MAT leaders' roles could highlight the limitations associated with instructional leadership as being overly dependent on one person. Moreover, the limited reference to wider MAT leader roles in non-teaching positions added to research which identified that leaders could improve student outcomes through being focused upon the development of teacher practice and leadership roles (CUREE, 2009; Parlar and Cansoy, 2017). It also indicated though, an imbalance in leaders' understanding of the plethora of support needed to enable school improvement at scale.

Another finding from the data was that the insider-outsider perspective, in this case, was not limited to the role of the MAT leader. Being new to the school, but not new to the MAT, extended to some school leaders who moved between schools. They perceived that they were able to 'look into' their new school context. School Leader A recognised their own personal optimism, through being new to the school but not the MAT: 'I think that it's very hard when you're within, where you're in a leadership team where things aren't working, it's hard to be candid about it'. School Leader J added: 'I was seen as the person from [name of MAT] school but obviously

that wasn't the case at all' whilst MAT Leader D added: 'it's understanding how do we get great outcomes? What you want is a sustainable model'. These perspectives provided individual examples of how the MAT trained and retained leaders over a longer period. Having specific 'tools' to share with schools aligned with Ofsted (2018) who identified that leaders were striving to avoid becoming trapped in a cycle of underperformance.

The 'Insider-Outsider' perspective also reflected in practice, Higham, Hopkins, Matthews (2009) who stated that the expansion of the Academies programme since 2002 brought new challenges to the role of the school leader. Clarity concerning the elements of role matter in enabling individual and collective identity (Biddle 1979, 1986; Sias and Duncan, 2019). Considering this, prior experience as a school leader was an important pre-requisite for the role: 'You need to have done it yourself', (MAT Leader A). This contrasted with studies (Academies Commission, 2013; National Audit Office, 2010; Gunter and McGinty, 2014; Gibson, 2018) which suggested that under government policy individuals from a range of contexts could be invited to lead academies. These points further highlighted how different leaders had moved between roles to collaboratively support school improvement across the MAT, illustrated in Figure 17.

Additionally, the movement gave an insight into the complexity of leading change in social contexts described by Fullan (2019) in the new research domain of the

sponsored academy in the MAT context. This was significant because literature (Hill *et al.*, 2012; Salokangas and Chapman, 2014; Andrews *et al.*, 2017; Hutchings and Francis, 2017; Papanastasiou, 2017; Greany, 2018; OFSTED, 2019) had shown that the ways in which MATs influence their schools remained a new research area. Recently, Ofsted (2019) used a case study which reflected on a larger scale, the approach in this study, Researchers interviewed school and MAT leaders from 41 MATs and undertook documentary analysis to explore the perceptions of school leaders and teachers on their experiences of being part of a MAT. Whilst this case study is smaller in scale, the synthesis of interview and documentary data added additional, practical understanding into leadership practices within MATs and the illustration overleaf contributes towards this:

Figure 17: Representation of school and MAT leaders' interaction

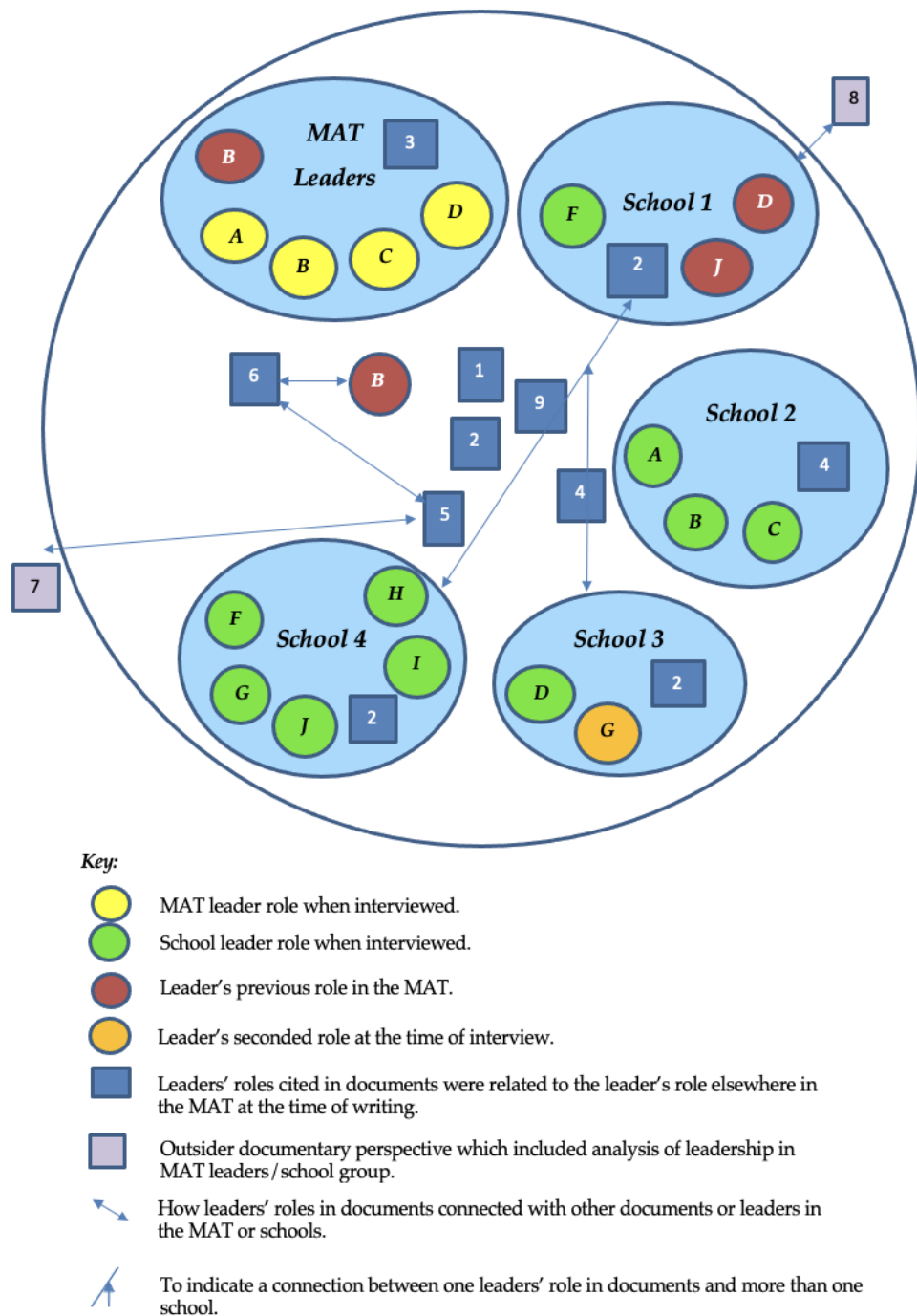


Figure 17 also illustrated in practice, the need for clarity where leaders' roles moved across the organisation. The insight contributed to furthering our understanding of how the turnaround context is managed in the sponsored academy situated in the MAT. More widely, it provided a worked example of the idea that the school as the single unit could now be too isolated to support rich teacher development experiences (Brown and Flood, 2020). On the other hand, the necessity for an illustration by way of making sense of such movement also indicated the complexity of leading in the sponsored academy context. In doing so, this reflected a limitation of the study. Whilst Figure 17 gave an insight into the movement and subsequent opportunities for collaboration and the 'insider-outsider' perspective, it could not seek to illustrate the interactions of professionals across the wider organisation. As such, the ephemeral and transitory nature of within MAT collaboration also surfaced through its limitations.

9.4 The role of Instructional Leadership Models

Leaders valued the opportunity to use shared curriculum and coaching models as another representation of collaboration. They perceived that this helped to address the issue of knowing how to develop individual teacher practice (Danielson, 2006). Although prescriptive approaches were more likely in sponsored academies (Greany and McGinity, 2021), leaders identified that a 'one size fits all' approach was not insisted upon across the MAT. The problem with this was that through not having a

'recipe' (Fryer, 2015) it was difficult to establish what to 'prioritize and the difference between a symptom and a cause' (MAT Leader A). This suggested that MAT agreed approaches were valued where they existed. Whilst there was only one MAT Leader voice included here, this perspective also added to the wider view (DfE, 2012; NCTL, 2014) that still, in practice, there remained no blueprint for the academy model. Equally though, MAT Leader A provided an insight into why a single model might not help: 'you want to be able to add capacity' but in an established school context, the role was 'more advisory' as 'you're not rolling up your sleeves and doing a lot of the heavy lifting'.

Alternatively, developing models trialled in its own schools contributed towards closing the knowledge gap. It was pertinent as Chapman (2015) noted the data of robust research evidence guiding MAT leaders remained limited, the interview data provided practical insights showing that leaders were willing to engage in the use of such models in the sponsored academy context. Moreover, the MAT's interest in developing models challenged Hutchings and Francis' (2018) criticism of trusts who performed well but were slow to share their approaches. On the other hand, the MAT's approach could also reflect Robertson's (2012) criticism that such investment in teacher improvement had become a globally marketable commodity when traditionally, teachers' work was organised on a local or national scale.

Where government academy policy had been criticised (Ball, 2009; Junemann and Ball, 2013; Ball, 2013b) for muddling the lines between the state, the public and the private, documents suggested how the MAT situated itself in this debate. The MAT described how their work was not limited by national boundaries allowing them to 'create and incubate ventures' to 'improve education as a whole' (Document 1a) to become 'sustainable and independent over time' (Document 2, p.5). This added to the point raised by Eyles *et al.* (2017) that actions taken by MATs that led to improved student outcomes were difficult to understand through providing insight from the perspective of leaders working in sponsored academy contexts

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9.4.1 Instructional Leadership Models: Curriculum

Leaders discussed how curriculum models mattered. They formed the basis for planning, assessment and teacher professional development. MAT Leader A felt that: 'if we hadn't had a common approach to a five-year curriculum, I think it would have been much harder', because 'if you come in and give them a good curriculum and good assessments and clarity, you've got some really clear tools to use'. This was seen to support shared planning and as School Leader D explained, moderation was: 'so much more powerful'. These perspectives fitted with studies (Creemers and Kyriakides, 2008; CUREE, 2009; OECD, 2014) which advocated leaders should seek to be close to the daily practice of teachers, characteristic of instructional leadership

as this could contribute purposefully to sustainable improvement (Greany and McGinity, 2021).

Curriculum models also provided opportunities for teachers to experience leadership of change. Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009) and Schleicher (2012) both showed that the style of leadership could positively affect teacher self-efficacy and collective responsibility. Document 3, written by a MAT leader, explored teachers leading collaboration: 'there must be a common and binding agreement between teachers, as the agents of curriculum instruction, as to what needs to be learnt when'. It engaged the moral aspects of leadership in terms of teacher values and beliefs and fitted with Danielson (2006) who highlighted the importance of teachers collaborating from within their classrooms. This was discussed by leaders interviewed who explained the importance of teachers being able to plan and moderate student work collaboratively.

9.4.2 Instructional Leadership Models: Coaching

Another example of MAT agreed approaches described by a range of leaders was an investment in instructional leadership coaching. The implementation of instructional leadership could be hampered through leaders being insufficiently trained in what effective teaching practice looked like (Fink, 2009; Schleicher, 2012; OECD; 2014; Hvidston *et al.*, 2015). This, the OECD (2014) stated, was not helped by

leaders' time being dominated by operational elements of school improvement such as finance or maintenance. Responses from leaders suggested that MAT practices in terms of the practical implementation of this style of leadership could challenge these perspectives through taking intentional action towards coaching teachers and leaders. School Leader D shared: 'looking at how you coach others, but the first part of that programme is that you have a coach yourself'. School Leader B also described support from a MAT leader who: 'helped me check that I wasn't being bonkers about the things I was saying'. Similarly, School Leader A received support: 'he's there at the end of the telephone line whenever I need him and it's hugely valuable'.

Investment in instructional leadership also extended to supporting leaders in school with coaching teachers early in their careers. School Leader B noted: 'we had an extra tutor 2 days a week to help us with real-time coaching' which suggested a commitment from the MAT to investing in instructional leadership to support teachers but also leaders. This also agreed with leadership studies (Bush and Glover, 2014; Hargreaves, 2014; Godfrey, 2017) and indicated that strong leaders were those who could improve the practice of their teachers.

The purpose of investment in the development of teacher practice was explained by leaders in both roles. School Leader G's stated: 'here, you were starting literally, from the first page of how to be a teacher' was reiterated by MAT Leader C who described

the work of a colleague: 'seeing a lot of instructional leaders and principals doing this work and [they] firmly believe that [they] need to be able to do it as well'. Literature (Creemers and Kyriakides, 2008; CUREE, 2009; Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd, 2009; OECD, 2014) found that leaders personally engaging in teacher development was important. MAT Leader C explained the impact in practical terms:

... priority and therefore the schedule gets built and our PD. Everything gets built around teaching and learning not around ops and housekeeping.

This further added to our understanding of how instructional leadership was implemented in practice. The latter point gave concrete advice to school leaders which could be explored further, particularly given the wider context which indicated that instructional leadership practices remained operationally undefined in schools (Hvidston *et al.*, 2015; Bush and Glover, 2016).

Documents added further, practical detail to the insight provided above. In Document 6, a Charter School leader advocated that 'when school leaders take the football approach to training teachers, observing them in action and paying close attention to their actions - they revolutionise their impact on instruction and learning' (Document 6, p.25). A school leader reflected: 'I can't believe I didn't think of this earlier, in every profession where you have to perform, you spend more time practising than you do delivering', (Document 3, p.31).

These insights added to the perspective of MAT Leader C. Where they are limited though is in how leaders in the struggling school context might balance the need to implement such an approach, together with the challenges they face concerning teacher recruitment and retention, together with other operational concerns highlighted earlier by School Leader H. Furthermore, whilst the approach described in the documents suggested practical advice, it is likely that there is limited expertise in the school to support teachers and leaders in the ways described. This could then lead to the struggling school becoming inadvertently dependent on the role of the MAT leader which heightens the challenge, particularly given the infancy of this type of school leadership.

Despite this, the Charter School leader argued that 'coaching teachers simply cannot be put on the back burner' (Document 6, p.26). The leader in the same document supported this view. They explained that working with the Charter leader helped them to see that 'it's imperative that we made it happen' (Document 6, p.32) despite 'the biggest roadblock for a leader making the shift to the football approach is time' (Document 6, p.26). This reflected research carried out by Ofsted (2019) which advocated instructional practices being prioritised for leaders.

The Principal however also identified that not all teachers see the need to improve (Davies, 2018): 'teachers think, 'I'm already an excellent teacher, why do I need to be coached further?'' (Document 6, p.32). The author of Document 5 stated in response,

that leaders 'have to clear the current path of obstacles' to enable them to be 'sufficiently in touch with the minutiae of school life' (Document 5, p.225). It required them to balance a 'twin pressure of keeping one eye on the mountain in the distance and one eye on the pebble on the path' (Document 5, p.225) to 'constantly direct teachers' attention back to teaching' (Document 7, p.229). These perspectives concurred with Bush and Glover (2014) who suggested that blending leadership styles enabled them to maintain their focus on improving teacher practice. Additionally, the perspectives of an executive level and a Charter School leader also provided an insight into the extended community of the MAT and its influence on the practice of school leaders. This fitted with Olmedo (2017) who stated that the MAT operated internationally and as Author 1, (2013) DFE, (2014) noted, identified strongly with the notion of investment in teacher improvement.

9.5 Motivations for leadership

The concept of the MAT was a relatively new phenomenon in educational policy. This was reflected in data which suggested that whilst leaders were motivated by the idea of making a difference, they also faced challenges typical of struggling school contexts more generally in terms of conflicting priorities and teacher recruitment. The key point of interest centred around the way MAT leaders responded to these challenges.

Firstly, some leaders moved between roles in the MAT in response to the issues of teacher recruitment and leader inexperience. In interview, School Leader B stated: 'I wanted to be in a school that needed the most work'. This contrasted with literature (Clegg *et al.*, 2017; Leckie and Goldstein, 2018; OECD, 2019) which suggested struggling schools had difficulty recruiting because experienced leaders were likely to work in more affluent areas. It also added new voices to findings from studies (Hutchings and Masaray, 2013; Ainscow, 2015; Greany, 2017) of the London Challenge where leaders saw schools as a 'Key to Success' and therefore, leaders chose to take up post in their sponsored academy. Through this, leaders' experiences indicated a potential solution to findings from Branch *et al.*, (2013) who stated that teachers in struggling schools were not appropriately qualified or were inexperienced in leadership (McAleavy and Riggall, 2016).

Confidence was also frequently apparent among participants interviewed. School Leader G stated: 'I've always worked in difficult, challenging schools so the challenge was not a shock'. When discussing the recruitment issues, School Leader G pointed out: 'There's no way that I could stand up and talk about the tough demands are worth it if I'm just going to turn around and walk off'. School Leader H on the other hand reported feeling inexperienced when they joined the MAT: 'I had my toolkit but there was so much that I had to learn'. This suggested that even when employed to carry out the work of leading turnaround in a struggling school, leaders still held different perspectives.

Another key motivation for leaders was the contribution they could make to the school community. Literature (Fullan, 2007; OECD, 2014; Gibson, 2018) suggested that school leaders provided the link between the school, the community and the wider educational system. School Leader G shared: 'I think in terms of my character, in terms of the school and the people and what they were trying to achieve, and I wouldn't allow myself to [give up]'. Likewise, School Leader H reflected:

I didn't give up because I had a responsibility to the families. If my contribution as a human being is that I am here for five.... ten years and if I have made 0.5% difference, I will have fulfilled my responsibility to the community.

These responses also fitted with research (Bass and Riggio, 2008; Waldman, Galvin and Walumba, 2012) which found that leadership engaged people's values and as Heifetz (1994) stated, they needed to act with moral purpose. Alternatively, these leaders' experiences do not add new insights into existing ideas concerning leadership motivations for change. Equally, these perspectives could not claim to represent the attitudes of leaders in the MAT as a whole. This was a small-scale study using a limited data collection to explore experiences from different angles to help to make sense of complex situations (Thomas, 2015). What these insights do provide though, is the opportunity to identify continuity in leader motivation in the context of the sponsored academy.

Going beyond the perspectives of individual leaders, documents indicated that the MAT more widely, held a philanthropic interest in school improvement. They stated that they wanted to 'provide an excellent education to children irrespective of their background' (Document 6, p.7), because they believed that 'Nothing should be a barrier to children achieving' (Document 1a). An executive described how they 'knew it could be done because it was happening in the US', (Document 8, p.4). In the same document, student data was included demonstrating this commitment, having students 'almost twice the 'level of low attainers on entry compared to national averages', (Document 8, p.3). The fitted with the findings of Hutchings and Francis (2017) where the MAT was compared to 48 other MATs. The research found that the MAT had the highest number of disadvantaged Year 11 students in sponsored academies in the group of MATs analysed. These findings suggested that the MAT contrasted with the wider academy development picture where the converter secondary academy dominated the academy landscape (Keddie, 2015; Leckie and Goldstein, 2018). This comparison also highlighted that while individual leaders may feel motivated by the opportunities to make a difference and in this case, such motivations were also evident in documents by or about the MAT, these had not necessarily translated into wider, systemic support for struggling schools. At the same time, the documentary data could be said to illustrate wider criticism of corporate philanthropy, as a means for enacting teacher improvement on a global scale (Robertson, 2012).

9.6 Leadership Priorities

Challenges typically experienced by leaders in struggling schools more widely, remained an issue for both school and MAT leaders in sponsored academies. These included struggling to recruit teachers, leaders having varying priorities and finding roles were changed or unstable. Alongside their motivations for leading change, participants held a range of priorities. These included having high expectations in securing improvement. One leader explained: 'when I first came, [name of Head] said that we were going to get all students five A* - C grades.', (Document 2, p.12) mirrored by: 'I was absolutely clear that the summit to which we would march was the creation of an outstanding school', (Document 5, p.225).

One explanation emerged from one of the founders of the MAT: 'we don't come from the starting point that we are experts in something. The first step was to, just as you might do in business, find out who does something very, very well, who does it best in the world and copy them', (Document 8, p.4). They identified: 'looking to Charter Schools', (Document 8, p.4) to learn how to: 'set high expectations and build relationships', (Document 8, p.4). This reflected Garner (2014) and Gibb (2015) who stated Charter Schools focused on developing students' academic strength and student character. They invested in instructional approaches to develop teacher practice and judiciously selecting school principals.

Gibb (2015) stated that these approaches generated interest from the UK government and as suggested in documents, those seeking to improve struggling schools at scale. By extension, the data could also address the dependence on the charismatic individual typically associated with transformational leadership. On the other hand, the literature on school improvement and the leadership of change is substantial. Consequently, narrowing the examples given in the documents to the work of Charter Schools, could reduce the scope for decision making. This was particularly pertinent given that Charter Schools as a whole, served 5% of school-age children in the United States of America thus limiting their overall contribution (William, 2016). However, in England, as indicated in Table 1 in Chapter 2, the sponsored academy represented 7% of schools in 2017 (DfE, 2017a) with the wider academy sector being 27% of school types.

Another challenge faced by leaders managing a range of priorities was the need to narrow their focus. Leaders across both phases and documents highlighted this as a key ingredient in helping them to plan activity in schools. In MAT Leader A's experience: 'focus is fundamental in school improvement'. School Leader F identified leaders should: 'focus on a few things...do them better '. The challenge to this though, School Leader C observed: 'you've got to learn what to let go and what to care about', and MAT Leader C: 'you just kind of have to say that's not that important'.

Maintaining a narrow focus was also evident in documentary data. Document 2 included the perspectives of two academy Principals who were in the same two geographical areas as the academies featured in one school in this study. One leader identified more generally creating 'a set of expectations and norms' related to the MAT (Document 2, p.6) where the other leader more specifically named that 'deliberate efforts' through a 'carefully crafted behaviour system that protects learning time' (Document 2, p.6). To do this, another Principal stated that: 'specific routines for key moments in the school day including corridor behaviour, lunch queues, entering classrooms' and 'what should be on your desk at the start of a lesson' (Document 7, p.227) to establish a purposeful learning climate. These views suggested that although their focus varied, leaders commonly concentrated on a limited set of priorities.

The approach was put into a sporting context by School Leader A: 'Barcelona practice short passes for 70% of their training time. You never stop doing that stuff'. It implied a sense of unity in a context where School Leader D acknowledged that: 'each school is so different'. The use of a sporting analogy further challenged the idea that leaders in struggling schools were inexperienced. Berliner (2004) found that novice practice required context free approaches to training. Leaders, able to explain their practice by drawing comparison with sport could suggest automaticity, typically found to be characteristic of an expert.

These stories also aligned with Hopkins (2013) and Chapman (2019) who showed that there was less interest in 'one size fits all' in favour of leaders adopting approaches as appropriate to their school context. Document 6 (p.226) described how: 'dozens of doorstops to encourage teachers to keep the door open whilst teaching. [They] introduced a new uniform with a blazer and a school bag', because 'norms and rituals are powerful tools for seeking to demarcate their own values', (Document 5, p.225). This was supported by another leader in a different MAT school who 'encourage[d] the students to take their education seriously [by] introducing a new uniform, redecorating the school building', (Document 8, p.14). The immediacy of the approach concurred with Leithwood, Harris, Strauss (2010, p.226) as such concentration on small details was implemented from the beginning. Gorard (2014) identified visible aspects of change more commonly associated with academy sponsorship.

However, the unpredictability of the school's situation extended to leaders having different priorities both within and across school contexts. Fullan (2019) explained the variance by showing that leaders might not know what to focus on first. In Phase 2, School Leader H explained that:

I had to build trust and so held parent meetings every Friday morning. At some points, we had 130 families in the hall because they were angry. Angry about everything.

This was reiterated by School Leader G: 'every time there was a message or something that needs to be communicated it had to be done twice'. They agreed with the views of School Leader B in Phase 1: 'they [staff, students and parents] need to know that you know that this isn't good'. Such practice was associated with a transformational leadership style, indicating agreement with Hopkins (2013) and Chapman (2019) that leaders typically adopted a range of approaches appropriate to their school context.

The lack of predictability of leadership role was also evident in 6 out of the 9 documents. This concurred with literature (Hopkins, 2013; Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2019), and responses from leaders interviewed that effective leadership was situational and approaches varied. Here, leaders drew upon a range of practices in relation to the demands of the school. This was evident in the MATs own articulation of its' approach. They focused on establishing common values to unite trust schools whilst 'each school has its own ethos and character they all draw upon the same principles', (Document 1b). By extension, literature (Leithwood, Harris and Strauss, 2010; Greany, 2018; OFSTED, 2018) found that the variation across leaders in the same role, across different schools, might also contribute to existing understandings of the importance of context when considering how to stem a school's decline. This further added to the idea that whilst standardised approaches in terms of instructional leadership were valued by leaders, individual

contextualisation of practice and technique remained a key element in the sponsored academy improvement journey.

9.7 The impact of teacher recruitment

Another challenge typically experienced by leaders in struggling schools more widely, and remained an issue for leaders in sponsored academies, was teacher recruitment. Whilst several participants in both phases explained that they had chosen to work in the sponsored academy, OFSTED (2018) stated that leaders found the recruitment of teachers challenging. School Leader H described how there were: '65% supply staff in our first year'. School Leader G added: 'there were new working practices that some staff weren't used to. This builds the pressure, particularly in a time where the recruitment process is incredibly hard'. This suggested that the difficulties experienced by leaders in struggling schools also extended to the sponsored academy context, thereby shedding light on literature (Leithwood, Harris, Strauss, 2010; Golan, 2015; McAleavy and Riggall, 2016; OFSTED; 2017; Papanastasiou, 2017) which sought to understand more about the everyday experiences of leaders in these contexts.

One of the consequences of challenges around teacher recruitment was that leaders might have to adapt to their circumstances and roles (Valli and Buese, 2007). Interviews in Phase 2 illustrated the idea of changing roles and mirrored an

interactionist approach described by Turner (2006) and Burke and Stets (2009). School Leader I stated that: 'it was not kind of known what your role is or how your role should look. And that constantly changing was really hard'. For School Leader G however, the role remained transient: 'because there was expertise starting to be built up. As the person I worked alongside became more expert and skilled, I picked up different elements.' School Leader J explained: 'The biggest shift happened when we appointed people under me, because for the first year essentially, I did everything'.

In contrast to School Leader I, School Leader G felt that transience: 'left [us] with a hard-core group of people who were on message and the message echoed the school mission'. These perspectives showed that there are a range of circumstances under which roles might change and that these are not necessarily confined to situations of staff shortages. Indeed, changes could occur through increased stability and add to the range of communities which leaders participated in both within their school context and more widely, across the MAT. This could then, further add to the diagram in Figure 17 which illustrated examples of how leaders not only experienced change between schools and roles in the MAT but also within the role they occupied at the time of interview for a range of reasons which were not limited to teacher recruitment issues.

On the other hand, interview data suggested that where the leader was part of the predecessor school, they seemed to be less concerned with the scope of their own role. In contrast though, they were anxious about the incoming MAT and what, as Berger and Luckmann (1966, p.165) identified, the 'common stock of knowledge' might be. This was reflected in School Leader D's experience: 'when you're new to [MAT] there's a danger of 'I just need to slot in and be ok'. Here, the leader had more than one role at the time of joining the MAT and so shared a common experience with others in terms of their position needing clarity. Interview data suggested that whilst the status associated with leadership in schools might be structurally established, as Turner (2006) recognised, in practice, it might be less so. Moreover, aspects of roles, which might be assumed to be predictable, often were not (Biddle, 1986; Turner, 2006; Sias and Duncan, 2019). Therefore, despite the possibility that the sponsored academy might offer a new beginning for schools seeking to improve, challenges facing the profession, such as teacher recruitment persisted. This data therefore agreed with Andrews *et al.* (2017, p.7) who found that academy chains were not 'a panacea' for school improvement.

Chapter 10 considers the discussion of data and findings from chapters 8 and 9 in relation to the research questions.

CHAPTER 10: SUMMARY OF OVERALL FINDINGS

10.1 Introduction

Kelle (2014) identified a theoretical approach for transferring existing concepts such as leadership of change in schools, to new research domains. The inception of government academies policy in 2002 related to the MAT in England. This represented a new domain in research. Leaders of the MAT in this study opened their first sponsored academy within 5 years of the policy. This case study explored leadership individually and collectively. The ways participants experienced their situations depended on their own perceptions of their schools and leadership circumstances.

The research questions were:

1. How did the leaders in the sponsored academies perceive and enact their roles in school improvement?
2. How did leaders from the MAT perceive and enact their roles in school improvement in sponsored academies?
3. How did the roles of the school leader and the leader(s) from the MAT interact in relation to school improvement in the MAT?

4. What can be learned about the leadership of school improvement from the common and varying experiences of leaders across the MAT in this context?

Table 15 shows a summary from across the data discussed in Chapter 9 in relation to the research questions. These were grouped by role (column 1), noted as 'summary of findings from across the data' (column 2) and considered in relation to literature from Chapters 2 to 6 (column 3). These were then grouped by research question (column 4).

Chapter 9 identified the importance of collaboration between school leaders. These leaders were not limited by their geographical location, whilst instructional models related to coaching and curriculum were key features of leaders' experiences in their sponsored academy contexts. Challenges concerning the recruitment of staff and how to identify key priorities for improvement were commonly identified by leaders in both the sponsored academy and struggling school context more widely. These findings were then used to answer individual research questions.

Table 15: Summary of data sets explored in Chapter 9.

Role, Style and Focus	Summary of findings from across the data	Did these themes agree with Literature?	Answers research question
(A) School Leader	Recruitment challenges remained.	Yes	1
	Time mattered in turnaround.	Yes	
	Leaders had a variety of motivations for working in sponsored academies.	Yes	
	Outlier: not all leaders felt confident and experienced.	Yes	
	Leaders held different views on joining the MAT.	Yes	
	Leaders held different views on what support from the MAT looked like.	Yes	
	Some leaders struggled to use Instructional Leadership techniques.	Yes	
	Roles of school leaders still not well understood.	Yes	
(B) MAT Leader	MAT leaders had different views of who to support.	Yes	2
	MAT leaders wanted to build relationships with school leaders.	Yes	
	Distributed leadership possible through MAT leaders.	Yes	
	Prior experience was valued.	Yes	
	'Insider-outsider' perspective emerged.	Yes	
	MAT leader roles varied by context.	Yes	
	MAT leaders had complex roles.	Yes	
	MAT leader under-represented in documentary data.	No	
(C) MAT-wide approaches	Leaders valued Instructional Leadership	Yes	3
	Different leaders held different ideas about context.	Yes	
	Outlier: Some leaders were confident they could lead the turnaround.	No	
	Roles were transient.	Yes	
	Leaders had different ideas about what to focus on.	Yes	
	Focus mattered in the sponsored academy context.	Yes	
(D) Approaches to improvement	Range of loose-knit communities available through the MAT.	Yes	4
	Transparency mattered when leading change.	No	
	Mental models valued by MAT leaders.	Yes	
	Curriculum models were valued.	No	
	Published strategies were valued.	No	

Key:

- A:** School leaders' roles, style and focus
B: MAT leaders' roles, style and focus
C: Common ideas relating to MAT-wide approaches.
D: Approaches to turnaround: the response.

In line with literature explored in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, leaders experienced variation in style, role, focus and leadership context. Where leaders agreed however, was that they valued MAT-wide approaches being available to support them in leading change. Outlier examples which did not link to literature or data that were individual in nature, were identified as 'No' in the column 3. These included the idea of the 'insider-outsider' perspective experienced by MAT leaders working across sponsored academy contexts and some school leaders transferring between schools.

The discussion in the remainder of this chapter, synthesised the data in relation to literature and the research questions. Conclusions, implications and limitations are then summarised in Chapter 11.

10.2 Research Questions

Research Question 1: How did the leaders in the sponsored academies perceive and enact their roles in school improvement?

Firstly, some leaders perceived a lack of clarity concerning their role. This was in line with literature (Day and Harrison, 2007; DeRue, Ashford and Cotton, 2009; DeRue and Ashford, 2010) which showed that leaders experienced instability but for different reasons. School Leader G's role changed because others had developed expertise whereas School Leader I experienced sudden change due to staff

shortages. It suggested that although the role of a school leader appeared structurally established, in practice this was not necessarily the case (Turner, 2006). Furthermore, whilst research (Biddle, 1986; Turner, 2006; Sias and Duncan, 2019), stated that elements of the role could be perceived to be predictable, again, in practice they might not. This contributed to these established theoretical perspectives in a new dimension: the sponsored academy. The nature of the study was though, limited to those leaders interviewed and material included in selected documents. Different leaders may have held different perspectives.

Secondly, in trying to enact change, leaders experienced similar difficulties to those in struggling schools in recruitment. This added to literature (Clegg *et al.*, 2017; Leckie and Goldstein, 2018, OECD, 2019) but in a new context. For some leaders in the study, such experiences contributed to their sense of transience. Participants shared how the staffing context included high numbers of supply teachers and staff turnover. These reflections supplemented evidence (Leithwood, Harris, Strauss, 2010; Golan, 2015; McAleavy and Riggall, 2016; OFSTED; 2017; Papanastasiou, 2017) which suggested little was known about the work of teachers and leaders in struggling schools. In relation to teacher recruitment, sponsored academies in the case, mirrored the challenges in research (Andrews *et al.*, 2017, p.7) which indicated that academy chains were not necessarily 'a panacea' to school improvement.

An interesting finding, however, was that a leaders' perception of their role was influenced by their own motivation for working in the sponsored academy context. Some, although not all, leaders approached their role with confidence. These leaders were typically new to the academy but already employed by the MAT and as such, contrasted with Ball (2003) who stated that leaders might suffer from anxiety or self-doubt in struggling schools. In this case, leaders' perspective fitted with the concept of their school being a 'Key to Success' reminiscent of the London Challenge (Hutchings and Masaray, 2013; Ainscow, 2015; Greany, 2017).

Exploring this further, it emerged that some leaders held roles elsewhere in the MAT. This was the case for 5 of the 14 participants interviewed, which suggested the MAT sought to retain and redistribute leaders. These experiences also challenged Kutash *et al.* (2010), Clegg *et al.* (2017) and Leckie and Goldstein (2018) who found that leaders and teachers typically chose to work in more affluent areas. It also contrasted with OECD (2019) which established that leaders in challenging schools were more likely to leave. On the other hand, Hutchings and Francis (2017) identified that this MAT was 1 of 10 MATs (1% of all MATs) in England that comprised 30 or more schools. As such, the data could not be said to represent the MAT as a whole. Further research could though, identify whether this was indicative of the approach adopted by the MAT more widely or evident in other MATs. In addition, being an insider did not automatically guarantee trust and therefore openness or honesty (Savvides *et al.*, 2004) which could have limited responses.

Data also suggested that leaders did not always share a common view of what to prioritize when leading improvement. School 2 was particularly interesting. There was a contrast between those interviewed in the same school, in that they not only had different ideas about what to prioritize, but also different perceptions of what each other was prioritizing. Weiss *et al.* (1995) and Gilgun (2014) stated that the leadership of change was a complex process to enact. Research (Creemers and Kyriakides, 2008; CUREE, 2009; Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd, 2009; OECD, 2014) and several leaders interviewed and cited in documents, observed that instructional leadership was valued in developing teacher practice.

However, some leaders noted that they needed support to accurately identify what teachers needed to do to improve. Earlier research undertaken by Berger and Luckmann (1966, pp.165), suggested that leaders' roles and thereby focus could not necessarily be associated with a 'common stock of knowledge'. In line with Kelle (2014) this contributed towards developing existing understandings of the leadership of teacher practice. As such, there were no 'silver bullets' (Document 6, p.7) or as Fullan (2007) noted, no single model for improvement. On the other hand, these insights could be limited. Harding (2013) explained that documentary data was not interactive and as such, those cited did not have the opportunity to clarify meaning or consider their views in the context of the research. This was certainly relevant to the case study.

Research Question 2: How did leaders from the MAT perceive and enact their roles in school improvement in sponsored academies?

Data suggested that MAT leader roles brought an 'Insider-Outsider' perspective. That is, they were employed by the MAT, but outsiders when working in schools, which indicated MAT leaders held complex roles and responded to school context. This was interesting when compared to Harris and Mujis, (2003) and Harris (2005) who found that very little was known about the work of middle and senior leadership teams with even less research focused on leaders working in turnaround contexts (Leithwood, Harris, and Strauss, 2010; House of Commons, 2017a).

Another consideration for leaders was how they developed relationships. School leaders had greater clarity regarding what to expect from MAT leaders. They saw that such a role 'added to our work. They were alongside us.' As such, the MAT leader role supported loose-knit communities described by Bauman (2008) and in the schooling context, collaborative cultures (Chapman, 2019; OECD, 2019). The opportunity to participate in such communities locally, nationally and globally was important to school leaders. These perspectives reflected those of Hargreaves (2010) who noted the significance of capturing and articulating what leaders did, which in this context was the role of the MAT leader.

Furthermore, whilst leaders agreed that it was useful to build relationships, participants did not all agree on which school leaders were the priority. These included senior leaders working at geographical regional level, Principal, senior and

leaders of large subject areas and individual teachers. Studies (Gronn, 2000; Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd, 2009; West-Burnham, 2018) of collaboration showed that relationships rather than positional authority have started to become more important. This also supported literature (Goss 2005 in Hill *et al.*, 2012; Schleicher, 2012) which showed that collaboration was perceived to be not just the responsibility of school leaders but indicative of strong leadership.

Finally, leaders' perception of context varied between roles. In documentary data, reference to context, such as data referring to levels of socioeconomic disadvantage was presented. In contrast, MAT leaders interviewed appeared to be more focused on the immediate situations they saw when in schools, as defining context. It did not mean though, that socioeconomic data was not of interest to MAT leaders, more that it suggested some insight into initial priorities. This was insightful as it could be said to mirror studies of the London Challenge where schools were identified as opportunities for change (Hutchings and Masaray, 2013; Ainscow, 2015; Greany, 2017). The data also highlighted one limitation of the study. That is, data collected was restricted to the experiences of those interviewed or featured in selected documents. Further research could consider whether these experiences occurred for other leaders both in the MAT and beyond.

Research Question 3: How did the roles of the school leader and the leader(s) from the MAT interact in relation to school improvement in the MAT?

Analysis from research questions 1 and 2 indicated that leaders' roles, experiences, and practices were more fluid within and between schools and across the MAT than originally appeared. This was illustrated in Figures 5 and 17. Instead of remaining in the community of the school, leaders in a range of positions, moved between roles. Moreover, leaders' stories featured in documents further added to this and indicated that approaches in instructional leadership and curriculum were shared across the MAT. These reflected the experiences of leaders interviewed and implied some cohesion beyond visible elements such as MAT branding. It could also indicate an intentional approach towards addressing challenges in the recruitment and retention of leaders in the MAT. Figure 17 was however limited to those leaders interviewed or featured in the selected documents. Further research could provide an insight into whether it was typical of MAT practice or just particular to those leaders.

In addition, leaders reported that in practice, loose-knit communities (Bauman, 2008) existed in a range of contexts. These included subject teachers working together to plan collaboratively, attending training offered by the MAT and leaders working alongside each other in schools. Data revealed that leaders wanted to be able to access MAT-wide models or approaches to support them in their work. This was reinforced by MAT leaders who wanted to offer approaches to school leaders

in newly sponsored academies. While they discussed the importance of having visual models in memory, tangible, context free options were favoured, partly in recognition of the complexity of support needed in each school context. A 'toolkit' approach could have the benefit of being offered to a wider range of schools and their leaders. Mental models on the other hand, are more likely to be limited to the individual and variable in quality and delivery. One challenge though, was that such tools were not always uniformly available. In practice therefore, while leaders personally engaging in teacher development was shown in literature (Creemers and Kyriakides, 2008; CUREE, 2009; Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd, 2009; OECD, 2014) to be a priority, the impact could be reduced through having limited access to such approaches. On the other hand, attempts to codify practice could be deemed an over-simplification of complex approaches (Greany and McGinity, 2021) to school improvement.

Leaders also agreed that focusing on a limited number of priorities mattered. They commonly discussed how these would initially be dominated by improving expectations and codifying specific approaches to mundane daily activity advocated by Hargreaves (2010). MAT Leader A stated: 'focus is fundamental in school improvement.', with similar sporting analogies used to illustrate appearing across data. A collective articulation of a focus on small details concurred with Leithwood, Harris and Strauss (2010) which could though, represent a challenge in practice in the struggling school context. This is because, as data and studies (Weiss, 1995;

Fullan, 2001) showed, leadership of change was complex through multiple demands placed on leaders enacting improvement.

However, the prominence of MAT leaders working in schools, from the perspective of school leaders, varied from documents. In the documentary evidence, there was less mention of these roles. In contrast, school leaders talked widely about the importance of the MAT leader in helping them to identify what to prioritise. This could be because the role, along with the wider academy trust arena remained relatively new and that when collaborating, relationships (Gronn, 2000; Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd, 2009; West-Burnham, 2018) were valued by leaders. Hvidston *et al.* (2015) and Bush and Glover (2016) stated that the role of the Instructional Leader remained unclear and overly dependent on one person. The continuation of these issues into the MAT context aligned with Gorard (2014) who showed that although visible aspects of schools could be immediately improved, wider policy assumptions that MATs would generally improve schooling were flawed.

Research Question 4: What can be learned about the leadership of school improvement from the common and varying experiences of leaders across the MAT in this context?

An interesting juxtaposition arose in the study. Despite the popularity of standardised approaches, individual leaders continued to implement different approaches to leadership. Not all schools belonging to the MAT needed rapid improvement. This reinforced the view that system leadership in the context of

MATs, as Blunkett (2000) stated, did not equate to a single model which also agreed with the perception of leaders in the MAT; 'we make no grand claims about academisation', (Document 6, p.7). The absence of a single model could further be explained by the complexity of each school context with different approaches being required at specific moments in the improvement journey. In this respect, literature could provide theoretical perspectives to help leaders identify what action to take when seeking improvement. More widely, the role of the MAT leader could help school leaders to be aware of such approaches while answering, in some part, the dilemma raised by data and literature (Danielson, 2006; Markholt, Michelson and Fink, 2018) that leaders did not always know how to help teachers to improve. Agreed approaches could therefore make some contribution in this respect.

On the other hand, the challenge of selecting priorities identified in existing studies (Ball, 2003; Leithwood *et al.*, 2019) was also reflected in leadership practice in this study. MAT Leader C identified 'nothing is mandatory' because 'we do not believe in a cookie cutter approach' (Document 8, p. 8). These viewpoints agreed with Fullan (2019) who found that individual leaders saw and held different priorities. It was also pertinent when considering struggling schools for whom studies (Leithwood, Harris and Strauss, 2010; Greany, 2018; OFSTED, 2018) established that early priorities focused on stemming the decline. NCSL (2011) also found that struggling schools most sought support with leadership development and teacher practice highlighting the contribution that the role of a MAT leader could potentially make.

Further research to explore the MAT leader role could provide deeper insights into this aspect of school improvement.

Additionally, standardised approaches were seen to be valued in terms of the school curriculum which further suggested a changing landscape. Where individual styles remained in practice, leaders in the study increasingly valued knowing 'what works.' The role of effective school leaders had changed to become, as Branch *et al.* (2013) noted, those who could directly improve teacher practice. The experiences of these leaders suggested that these challenges have extended into their experience of the sponsored academy, albeit limited in numbers to those engaged in this study.

Another issue was an interest in approaching change through transparency. Leaders chose to be open with staff, students and in one participant's reflection, the community. There was variation though, in who leaders were transparent with. MAT Leaders interviewed did not engage with parents. Their role focused on working with leaders, teachers and in two out of four participants, students. School leaders on the other hand, provided the link between these groups and the wider education system (Fullan, 2007; OECD, 2014; Gibson, 2018). The insights of those leaders in this study therefore gave some understanding as to how leaders of sponsored academies engaged with these groups.

Finally, some leaders were experienced in leading struggling schools and had held more than one role in the MAT. Their experiences challenged literature (Branch *et*

al., 2013; Clegg *et al.*, 2017; OFSTED, 2017) regarding the recruitment and retention of strong leaders in struggling schools. 5 leaders out of 14 interviewed together with 2 perspectives in documents, had chosen to move to leading a newly sponsored academy in the MAT. Attempting to understand these leaders' experience fitted with Fullan (2001, p.31) who noted the 'messiness' associated with leading complex change. More widely, case study literature (Yin, 2003; Flyvbjerg, 2001; Thomas, 2013; Thomas, 2015; Candappa 2017) advocated the importance of exploring experiences from different angles to generate understandings. Where leaders had more than one experience of leadership in the MAT, multiple perspectives emerged. Informed by Charmaz (2014), reading the data from the beginning, and adopting a two-phase approach enabled the idea to be explored further in the latter part of this study.

CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSION

11.1 Introduction

Chapter 10 identified that leaders operated in a complex web of loose-knit communities. Although initially, the role of leaders appeared to be isolated to a single school or one working across contexts as a MAT leader, in practice, interactions and roles suggested something more hybrid. This chapter summarises the results of the study, contributions to knowledge, limitations, and implications for practice.

11.2 Research Questions

In summary, leaders experienced transience in their roles. Through a range of communities within the MAT, the role of a leader might appear structurally established, yet in practice this might not be the case (Turner, 2006). Leaders also experienced the impact of teacher recruitment difficulties which implied roles in the MAT context, constantly evolved (Gjerde and Ladegard, 2019).

Leaders identified that individual schools had different needs. Moreover, different MAT leaders held contrasting views concerning the leaders their work sat with. This illustrated the idea that MAT leaders' roles were complex and varied. What was significant though, was the potential importance of these roles for adding capacity to leadership in the sponsored academy context. Examples were evident in the interview data but less so in documents, suggesting that the role was less well understood. The study could therefore add to existing research (Leithwood, Harris, Strauss, 2010, p.13) relating to the roles of leaders in schools that require 'radical intervention'. Furthermore, some MAT leaders perceived that previous successful experience in at least, a middle leadership role in their own career, was important in guiding their work in sponsored academies.

What emerged less strongly was the way in which the MAT leader role, at this level, supported individual teachers to improve their practice. This was because whilst their immediate roles focused on providing practical support by working alongside school leaders of varying levels of seniority, MAT leaders cited they worked less directly with teachers. There was only one example where the interviewee perceived that they positively impacted on a teacher's classroom practice. Therefore, the idea that supporting leaders in the challenging school may not impact directly on student learning (MacBeath *et al.*, 2007) may extend to the role of the MAT leader in the sponsored academy context.

In addition, leaders identified with the idea of an 'insider-outsider' perspective. These ideas added to Weiss (1995) and Fullan (2001) who suggested that the leadership of social change in communities, was complex and messy. The fluid interaction of leaders within and between schools showed a model more akin to a 'web' than a group of individual sponsored academies operating under a single MAT identity. Moreover, leaders' roles required them to work across a variety of contexts to share practice, undertake training and develop relationships. Data also showed that leaders referred to American Charter Schools as influencing their practice. These were interesting findings that would benefit from further exploration.

Furthermore, it could be said that the practices of MAT leaders reflected the research design. Leaders' stories attracted subjectivity and variety (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Yin, 2003; Thomas, 2013; Thomas, 2015; Candappa 2017). As such, if other leaders were interviewed in this MAT or other MATs, they would have different views of their roles, what to prioritise and how to work together in the pursuit of school improvement (Thomas, 2016). Constantly drawing comparisons between information during the data collection phases and literature helped to make sense of these multiple realities (Charmaz, 2014; Gilgun, 2014). This allowed further exploration of the fluidity evident when leading complex change in the sponsored academy.

Finally, leaders held differing views concerning what to prioritise. Whilst leaders felt that MAT agreed approaches were helpful in leading change, individual leaders predominantly identified their own ideas for changes to school culture, leadership, and the improvement teacher practice. This was an interesting contradiction between intent and implementation of strategy. It was also significant that this view was evident in several leader responses. This suggested that within the limitations of the experiences of those interviewed, there was still, as studies (Blunkett, 2000; Fullan, 2007; DfE, 2012; NCTL, 2014) stated, no 'blueprint' or 'silver bullet', (Document 6, p.7) in leading improvement. Moreover, where potential solutions, such as instructional leadership approaches to curriculum or coaching existed, there was no guarantee of implementation at individual leader level. As such, their impact is arguably limited or conversely, overly reliant upon on a single leader (Hvidston *et al.*, 2015; Bush and Glover, 2016). In the longer term, this could lead to such models being unsustainable.

These ideas concurred with Ball (2003) and Leithwood *et al.* (2019) in that some leaders remained unsure of what to prioritize or value. However, other leaders reported confidence leading substantial change which could be attributed to having held roles elsewhere in the MAT. Furthermore, the experiences of these leaders in the MAT, contrasted with literature (Clegg *et al.*, 2017; Leckie and Goldstein, 2018) in relation to recruitment and retention. Exploring whether holding roles elsewhere

in the MAT was limited to these leaders or characteristic of the MAT and others more widely would enable this idea to be considered in greater depth.

11.3 Contribution to Knowledge

The study offers an original contribution to knowledge in leadership and structured professional collaboration. The study explored how leaders in a single MAT in England led change. Existing concepts of leadership role, style and focus leading change were considered in the context the sponsored academy situated in a MAT. The thesis is one of the few studies to have presented a detailed description of multiple leaders' voices from within the same MAT. This addresses a gap identified in literature (Hill *et al.*, 2012; Salokangas and Chapman, 2014; Andrews *et al.*, 2017; Hutchings and Francis, 2017; Papanastasiou, 2017; Greany, 2018; OFSTED, 2019), that the voices of school leaders were not frequently heard, and little was known about how the MAT influences its schools in practice.

In addition, the research added to existing understandings of the role of the MAT leader. This was valued by school leaders with recent examples of these roles examined. This was significant because the MAT as a system leader was, in 2016, 1 of 10 MATs (1% of all MATs) in England that comprised 30 or more schools (Hutchings and Francis, 2017) with wider, global influence (Olmedo, 2017). Moreover, existing studies on the MAT were limited and of those that existed (DFE,

2014), they included a narrower range of leaders with limited representation of MAT leader roles, parallel to that of a senior leader in schools. The research therefore contributes an original perspective in understanding how the MAT leader role might support school leaders in practice. This was significant because most existing studies were commissioned by government (Chapman, 2013). Furthermore, where evidence existed, it focused on exploring the impact of academies on student outcomes rather than qualitative studies which sought to consider how trust leaders improved schools (Greany, 2018; OFSTED, 2019).

Additionally, the research found that a 'recipe' (Fryer, 2015) or a 'cookie-cutter approach', (Document 8, p.8) did not dominate thinking. However, the data showed a professional curiosity concerning pedagogical and curriculum models at system level and how they could be used to sustainably support instructional leadership (Greany and McGinity, 2021). The research provided new insights into how a MAT could create a range of communities which spanned geographical location and focused upon a culture of peer support through leader roles. NCSL (2011) indicated that support in leadership development and leadership of teaching and learning was a priority for the struggling school. Thus, as Freebody (2003, p.45) stated, exploring the 'mundane, thoroughly recognisable but unremarked daily practices' within a school, region, and wider MAT context, makes a purposeful contribution towards this knowledge gap.

Finally, as Candappa (2017) found, the use of data, increased the opportunity for a range of leaders' voices to be heard. Indeed, studies (McCulloch, 2017; Richards, 2015; Smith, 2017; Thomas, 2013) showed documents were an under-used technique in data collection. As such, the study contributes an example of the perceptions of leaders in the context of a new research domain.

11.4 Limitations

Whilst the research contributed to existing understanding of school leadership, there were clear limitations. Firstly, this was a small-scale, nested case study. Exploring leaders' roles in a single MAT explored attracted subjectivity (Charmaz, 2006, 2014; Baghramian, 2015). Their experiences were narrative in style, anecdotal and contextually driven (Gilgun, 2014). Whilst this supported richness, complexity of experience and examination of the significance of context, the research design only sought to interview 14 leaders with additional contributions via documentary analysis. Other leaders in the same MAT could have different perspectives if interviewed or if other documents were included. The MAT also comprised a range of types of school including free schools, sponsored and converter academies, at both primary and secondary level. Therefore, this study could not claim to fully represent the wider work of the MAT in schooling or broader philanthropic terms or be seen to represent the MAT arena.

In addition, my positionality as an insider was a limiting factor. Though existing relationships with some participants could provide insight, participants could equally refrain from sharing details or authentic experiences (Cormier, 2017). This was because I was part of the social realities that participants explained (Charmaz, 2014). In addition, the conclusions that I drew might be different to those drawn by another researcher (Biddle, 1979). Moreover, documents were not interactive and were originally written with a different purpose. Whilst the dominance of insider perspectives in the documents selected could add to the overall focus on an insider experience, others might perceive this perpetuates a limited narrative.

Finally, it became clear as the study progressed that the roles of those leaders interviewed were complex. Some leaders had held more than one role in the MAT. Whilst this mirrored the view in Gilgun (2014) that our world is messy and challenging to access, as NCSL (2011) stated, leaders seeking to improve struggling schools most needed clarity and practical support.

11.5 Implications for practice

Whilst the study had clear limitations, some aspects could be purposefully applied in a professional context to guide school leaders. The research suggested that leaders had developed a shared interest in structured professional collaboration focused on teacher professional development. Leaders valued working together.

They saw that the MAT played an important role by organising events and deploying a team of leaders to work alongside schools. In addition, leaders recognised that there could be benefits to the use of MAT-wide approaches focused on developing teacher practice and curriculum. Some of these ideas have been shared in a published article in the Chartered College for Teaching Journal, Impact, in 2020 to provide a practical insight for other school leaders into how collaboration within subjects could improve teacher practice.

Secondly, leaders experienced transience in their roles but for different reasons. Clarifying roles could contribute towards meaning and structure being established in the struggling school context but does not guarantee conformity. In this case, the MAT actively placed leaders in their sponsored academies. This contrasted with literature (Kutash *et al.*, 2010; McAleavy and Riggall, 2016) because leaders mostly described how they approached the sponsored academy with confidence. More widely, it allowed them to select a small number of issues to address systematically. The approaches shown here influence my own school leader role which requires leadership through others who often meet complex challenges.

Finally, the research explored the role of MAT leaders. Data suggested that they adopted an 'insider-outsider' perspective; they felt a responsibility to be transparent and direct with school leaders. Whilst they did not agree upon which leaders were the key focus, they did believe that it was important to build relationships in schools.

They also saw that it was essential to understand each school's context. Having previously led successfully was also a significant consideration for leaders seeking to take up the MAT leader role. Having an insight into the insider-outsider perspective will be beneficial when mentoring post-graduate students. In this role, I am part of the institution in which they are studying, helping them to explore their own leadership, from the position of an outsider.

More widely, these findings could be relevant to other MAT leaders or MATs more widely, seeking to develop such roles. The framework in Figure 18 synthesised the findings of this research with questions focused on the roles of leaders enacting complex change in the sponsored academy context. This was important because the role of a MAT leader and the concept of a sponsored academy remained relatively new in educational policy terms. The framework is intended to be a practical tool to guide discussion when considering the wider leadership of change in the most recent iteration of collaboration in the struggling school context, the sponsored academy. This might make a purposeful contribution towards the addressing the issue identified by Ball (2003) where leaders are not always confident in what to focus on first.

Figure 18: Creating new from old: Framework to support leaders implementing change in sponsored academies

Theme	Role	Key Questions
Leadership Style, Role and Focus	MAT Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the roles of the MAT leaders in your organisation? • What pre-requisite experiences and attributes are important in the role of MAT leaders in your organisation? • Do MAT leaders have job descriptions which accurately reflect their roles in practice? • How are the roles represented in MAT documentation to support clarity of role and focus for schools? • How should MAT leaders identify priorities and key school leaders to support? • What are the agreed practices used by MAT leaders in developing leadership and teacher practice? • Which leader(s) in school and across the MAT do these roles report into? Is this the same leadership role across schools? • What measures are in place to track the impact of the role of the MAT leader in schools?
	School Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do all leaders have job descriptions, appropriate experience, and training to enable them to be effective in their role? • Do all leaders, whose role requires them to work with teachers to improve their practice know what the MAT agreed approaches are for their context? • Have all school leaders whose role requires them to improve teacher practice been trained in how to use MAT agreed approaches? • Can school leaders articulate the practices used by MAT leaders in developing leadership and teacher practice? • Do senior leaders in newly sponsored academies, leading the development of teacher practice, have a named link to a MAT leader?
	School and MAT leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the role of a shared curriculum and how is it used by leaders to support teacher practice? • Describe how leaders are supported over time to develop subject specific pedagogies and the delivery of curriculum. • What is the role of instructional coaching and how is it used by leaders to develop teacher and leader practice? • Describe how leaders are supported to develop coaching within their roles and schools.
Collaboration and Community	School Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What opportunities exist for leaders to collaborate within school? • How is training used to support leaders in ensuring these opportunities are focused on developing teacher practice? • How do these models align with the wider leadership and teaching priorities of the MAT? • How do you deploy leaders into supporting roles within school to support improvement and retention of expertise?
	School and MAT leaders in one area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What opportunities exist for leaders to collaborate across the region in which the school is situated? • How is training used to support leaders in focusing on developing teaching and leadership practice? • How do these models align with the wider leadership and teaching priorities of the MAT? • How do you deploy leaders locally to support improvement and retention of expertise?
	School and MAT leaders across the MAT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What opportunities exist for leaders to collaborate across the MAT? • What training takes place to support leaders in developing leadership practice in MAT schools? • How do these models align with the wider leadership and teaching priorities of the MAT? • How do you deploy leaders across the MAT to support improvement and retention of expertise?

11.6 Recommendations for further research

The case study focused on leadership experiences related to one large MAT in England. It had, as Junemann and Ball (2013) and Olmedo (2017) stated, interests and influence on an international scale and as a System Leader. There remained though, according to Chapman and Mujis (2013) and Chapman, (2013, p.338; 2015) a 'paucity' of empirical research into the complexities of academy leadership. Yet there are an increasing number of large MATs in England. Figure 17 illustrated the complex interaction between leaders in the MAT whilst Figure 18 articulated key questions to guide MATs in developing school and MAT leader roles in sponsored academies. A similar research design could be applied to further understand the ways in which leaders collaborated in and between sponsored academies.

Finally, examining what collaborative approaches were used by MATs and whether they made a positive contribution to improving schools could provide further assistance to school leaders in struggling schools. Greany (2018) stated that much of what was known about school leadership remained in studies of individual schools. This could, in turn, help to address a prevailing issue stated by OFSTED (2019), that strategies between MAT schools were still slow to be shared.

11.7 Conclusion

The MAT context has provided a new space in which to study the challenging school. Leaders in the case study suggested that different approaches continued to be adopted by different leaders. However, there was a growing interest in developing agreed approaches which could be used to support school improvement. Moreover, the MAT environment studied, provided opportunities for collaboration across a range of contexts. This implied that support from the MAT extended beyond that focused on teaching and learning in single schools. Data indicated that such communities existed in terms of leadership activity, rather than being limited by role. Exploring the stories of those who were not routinely heard gave some insight into how leaders in sponsored academies in a single MAT in England, a relatively new research domain, undertook the work of creating new from old.

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APPENDICES



Appendix 1: School Leader Information Sheet

Thank you for agreeing to consider being part of the research project.

Background

You are invited to take part in this research project, which is for my doctoral programme of study – Education Doctorate EdD – at the University of Birmingham. Before you make your decision, please take a moment to read the following information and do not hesitate to contact me if you require any clarification.

What is the purpose of the study?

The aim of my study is to surface the experiences of secondary school senior leaders in sponsored academies situated within multi-academy trusts. Whilst each senior leader's journey will be unique, we anticipate there to be common features that will become significant to the eventual findings of this research.

Who has reviewed the study?

This has been approved by the University of Birmingham Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Review Committee.

Why have I been chosen?

We invite your participation as we seek information from key staff who are in a position to reflect on their daily practice in leading change within sponsored academies situated within multi-academy trusts.

What does participation involve?

If you agree to be part of this project, we will ask you to take part in an interview, at a time and location convenient to you, lasting no more than 1 hour, reflecting on the approaches you have taken in your role in order to bring about an improvement in your school's circumstances.

What will I get from this study?

This may be an interesting opportunity for you to take some time out and reflect on your own career and daily practice. If you would like, I can provide a summary of findings for you.

Can I withdraw for the study?

You are under no obligation to take part in this research and can request to withdraw up to 4 weeks from the date of your agreement to take part. Any request to withdraw should be put in writing to the researcher whose details are provided below. Following your withdrawal from the study, any information you already provided will not be used in the analysis or final report, and any record of the data you provided will subsequently be destroyed.

What if there is something I am not happy about?

If you have any concerns please contact the researcher whose details follow. Should you wish to make a formal complaint, please contact my supervisory team who will take the matter forward for you.

Good Practice and Research Quality

All interview data remains confidential. To retain anonymity, individual names or identifying features will not be made available in any publication or to any other organisation or individual, and any reference made to participants will be via alphabetic reference or to the interview number.

With your permission, the interview will be recorded and transcribed within eight weeks of your interview. If you would like to review a copy of the transcript for accuracy, please indicate this on the consent form.

Feedback

You may also request a copy of the summary findings of this report on the consent form. This will be sent to you at the conclusion of the study.

Contact:

Researcher, Caroline Entwistle, Doctoral Student

Supervisor, Dr Tracy Whatmore

Supervisor, Dr Tom Perry

Appendix 2: Consent Form

Thank you for agreeing to being to be part of this research project.

This form should be completed prior to interview.

- I the undersigned voluntarily agree to undertake an interview lasting for approximately 1-hour interview on leadership in secondary education which is being undertaken by a doctoral student of the University of Birmingham.

☒
- I have read and understood the **School Leader Information Sheet** provided. I have been given an explanation by the researcher of the study, and of what I will be expected to do. My contribution will remain anonymous. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions on all aspects of the study and have understood the advice and information given as a result.

☐
- I understand that any information which is collected during interviews will be stored in line with the University's strict guidelines, which protects the secure storage of all data in its original form for a period of 10 years (or up to 20 years where data is of major social, environmental or heritage importance).

☐
- I understand that I can withdraw at the latest from the project within 4 weeks from the date of my agreement to participate and without needing to justify my decision. If I withdraw from the study, I understand that my data will not be used.

☐
- In the event of needing to complain, I understand that I should contact, in the first instance the researcher, Caroline Entwistle, or in the event of this not being satisfactory, the supervisory team of Dr Tracy Whatmore and Dr Tom Perry.

☐

- I confirm that I have read and understood all of the above and freely consent to taking part in this study. I have been given enough time to consider whether I want to take part and agree to comply with the instructions and restrictions of the study as explained by the researcher. ☐
- I would like to be sent a copy of the interview transcript to review ☐
- I would like to be sent a summary of the research findings upon conclusion of the research project ☐

Contact:

Researcher, Caroline Entwistle, Doctoral Student

Supervisor, Dr Tracy Whatmore

Supervisor, Dr Tom Perry

Name of volunteer
(BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Signed

.....

Date

.....

Name of researcher

Caroline Entwistle

Signed

.....

Date

.....

Appendix 3: Example School Leader Interview Schedule

Thank you for agreeing to today's interview. May I just check if there are any further queries you would like clarified before I start? If not, may I take the consent form now?

As you know I am interested in your experiences as a senior leader working in a sponsored academy within a multi-academy trust. I am exploring how you have brought about change from your point of view. I would be grateful if you were as open as possible in your responses and just remind you everything you tell me is confidential and will be anonymised.

Initial Experience/Motivation:

I would like you to cast your mind back and tell me about how you came to be working in the sponsor academy.

- How long have you worked at the school before it became sponsored?
- What prior experiences as a school leader have led you to be in this role?
- What motivated you to want to be in a senior leader role in a sponsored academy within a large multi-academy trust?
- If you joined the academy at or after the time of becoming sponsored, what motivated you to apply to lead there?
- How important to you is the identity and nature of the Multi-Academy Trust in which your school is situated?
- Documentation (e.g. Ofsted Reports) tells us that the school you are a leader in was experiencing very challenging circumstances when you joined/became sponsored.
- What motivates you to want to be in a senior leader role within this particular environment?

Early steps

I would like you to think about your early weeks at the newly sponsored academy:

- Describe what you initially saw and heard when you walked around the academy.
- Describe the school environment.

- Describe staff / leadership morale at the time.
- Could you describe yourself then? [Values, attitudes, culture]

Planning what to do:

- How well were the students performing?
- Describe what were your initial priorities upon the conversion to being a sponsored academy.
- How did you identify these priorities?
- Can you describe a significant incident or person from that time?
- How did you gain the support of existing staff?
- What training was implemented at the start, from day 1?
- What words did you associate with the environment in the first week?

Early support from the Multi-Academy Trust:

At this point I would like you to think about the role you were carrying out in context of being within a wider multi-academy trust.

- In practical terms, what actions did the multi-academy trust take in order to establish their identity within the school?
- Did your work interact with their role? Can you give examples?
- What do you understand by the multi-academy trust's role in supporting and challenging the work you were undertaking?
- How important was this to you in helping you to know what to do/make changes/succeed?
- What did this support look like and how often was this offered?
- How did you respond to this?
- What opportunities were there to work with colleagues from other schools within the trust?
- What effect did this have on your planning/thinking/daily improvement work?

12 weeks on:

I would like you to think about where you were 12 weeks later.

- Think of a significant incident or person at the time?
- What did this tell you about how your area of responsibility was changing?
- Can you talk through the actions you took to get to this point?
- Describe for me what you saw and heard around the academy 12 weeks on.

- What support did you receive from the multi-academy trust at this point? What did this look like in practical terms?
- Describe the issues that you were experiencing.
- Describe how you overcame them.
- What did success look like in practical terms for you in your area of responsibility at this point in the school's journey?

12 months on:

I would like you to think about how your area of responsibility evolved:

- What words would you use to describe the areas you were responsible for at this point?
- Describe what you saw and heard at this point, when you walked around the academy.
- Describe staff / leadership morale at this point.
- Can you describe a significant incident or person from this point in time?
- How had the profile of the staff changed by this point?
- What effect was this having on your ability to further develop your areas of responsibility?
- How did you retain the support of existing staff?
- What training was implemented at this point? Had this changed in any way?
- What did success look like in practical terms for you in your area of responsibility at this point in the school's journey?
- What actions did the multi-academy trust take, from your point of view, to support you in furthering improvement?

Today:

I would like you to think about 'where next'.

- What are the challenges you are now facing as a leader now?
- How have they changed from the moments in time previously mentioned?

Reflection over time:

- Looking back at your actions, what would you change in terms of the approach you took in the early stages of multi-academy sponsorship?
- What have you learned about yourself as a leader from your experiences to date?

- What advice would you give to someone who was starting at the beginning of the sponsored academy journey?
- Can you describe examples of how the multi-academy trust might have further supported the journey that you, as a leader were on at this point?
- Can you describe your relationship now with the multi-academy trust? What is their level of involvement with your work now?

Appendix 4: Example MAT Leader Interview Schedule

Thank you for agreeing to today's interview.

As you know I am interested in your experiences as a senior leader working across sponsor academies within a multi-academy trust. I am exploring how you have brought about change from your point of view. I would be grateful if you could be as open as possible in your responses and just remind you everything you tell me is confidential and will be anonymised.

I am interested in your role as a representative of the multi-academy trust in working with schools. I am interested in how, from a practical point of view, you supported the schools you worked with to improve.

Initial Experience/Motivation:

- How did you come to be working in the network?
- What does this role involve in terms of helping schools to improve?
- Documentation (e.g. Ofsted Reports) tells us that the schools you work with are often experiencing very challenging circumstances. What motivates you to want to be in this role?
- What level of school leader do you work with mostly?
- How is your role different to that of a leader within a secondary school that is trying to improve?
- How do you work with school leaders to support them in leading change?
- From my reading, it appears that leaders carrying out the type of work we might associate with school turnaround have to learn fast and are often not well prepared for the role, such is the complexity of the situation they walk into in a school. Would you say that this is true of your own experiences?
- How did you respond?

The Trust:

- How important to you is the identity and nature of the network?

- Researchers have found that 'we are far from having a well-codified process' (p.13) in terms of what to in order to turnaround a school. What work does the MAT do around this?
- Would you say you typically limit the autonomy given to the leaders you work with?
- What did your own autonomy look like in practical terms concerning decisions?
- What did this support from you look like and how often was this offered?

Your work across the MAT to support schools through professional development:

- How do you use professional development to support teachers across the MAT?
- How do you identify what to spend time on?
- How do you include and engage schools at all stages of their journey in this work?
- What examples or feedback have you had which suggests that this is an important part of helping the schools you work with to improve?
- What characterises the professional development offered by the trust in your view?

In school support:

Now I would like to walk through the kind of work you have undertaken in your support with schools. I would like you to think about your early weeks at a newly sponsored academy of your choice. The name can remain anonymous.

- Can you describe for me what you initially saw and heard when you walked around the academy?
- Describe the school environment.
- Describe staff morale at the time.
- And leadership morale?
- How did you present your role to the staff at the time?
- How important was 'buy in' to you?

Planning what to do:

- In practical terms, describe how you identified initial priorities.
- What are some of the barriers you encounter when working with schools in difficulty?

- How do you overcome these?
- What training was implemented at this point?
- How often did you visit the school?
- What did you do when not at the school in order to support it?
- Did you work in isolation or was there a wider team who you talked to from the MAT?
- How important is this wider team (the MAT) to the success of your work?

12 weeks on:

- Did the work which you undertook change as time went on?
- Can you talk through the actions you took to get to this point?
- Describe for me what you saw and heard around the academy 12 weeks on.
- What did success look like in practical terms for you in your area of responsibility at this point in the school's journey?

12 months on:

I would like you to think about how your role evolved:

- What words would you use to describe the areas you were responsible for at this point?
- Describe what you saw and heard at this point, when you walked around the academy.
- Describe what you had changed from your initial priorities when you joined or the school became a sponsored academy.
- What effect was this having on your ability to further develop your areas of responsibility?
- What training was implemented at this point? Had this changed in any way?
- Could you describe yourself then? [Values, attitudes, culture]

Your role now:

- How does your role now support schools more widely?
- Where can you see the effect of your work within schools which are at the start of their journeys?

Reflection over time:

- What have you learned about yourself as a leader from your experiences to date?

- What advice would you give to someone who was starting in your role at the beginning of the sponsored academy journey?
- How important do you think is the support provided through a role such as yours in helping schools to improve?