

Arden Multi-Academy Trust
Growth Plan
October 2020



Introduction and Context

Arden Multi-Academy Trust (AMAT) is a South Solihull-based Trust comprising four successful secondary schools. The Trust was formed in 2015 after Arden Academy took on the leadership, governance and management of Park Hall Academy. Through the success of our partnership at that time, AMAT brought in a third secondary school, Lode Heath School, in 2018 and then a fourth, Henley in Arden School, in 2019.

AMAT maintains that highly accountable and locally-led trusts provide the strongest outcomes for learners. As the Trust looks to the grow over the next five years, we wish to commit to that ethos by continuously strengthening our excellent management and operational systems. Ultimately, our aim is to become one of the most respected and successful Multi-Academy Trusts in the country.

The next phases of our growth will be driven by our vision to provide, support and champion the highest-quality provision at the heart of the communities we serve. We seek to create a family of academies that are committed to bringing together pupils, families and local stakeholders around inclusive education and shared experiences, thereby enabling ambitious and aspirational children and young people to achieve excellent outcomes.

We will not limit ourselves to incorporating Good or Outstanding schools but will also strive to support schools in challenging circumstances if they will benefit from our vision and school improvement services. At the same time, we strongly encourage each school to retain its own unique identity in order to serve and support its students and local communities to the highest possible standard. The success of our four original schools demonstrates that our mission to drive self-belief, self-esteem and self-confidence has the ability to impact the quality of education and aspirations for students in all communities.

Five years on from our inception as a Trust, AMAT is highly confident in the quality of our provision and the strength of our model of support. We are committed to building a family of academies that are aligned with our culture of providing excellent education for all of our current and future students.

Capacity to Grow

AMAT has built internal capacity and expertise to support schools joining the Trust. Our senior leaders and academic staff are imminently able to work with colleagues and students from other provisions to improve teaching and learning in all subject areas. We strive to be innovative educators by employing evidence-based improvement strategies and by offering the best support to teachers and leaders. Our approach is also determined by our strong local management and governing boards, which are richly comprised of experienced professionals with expertise from the worlds of school improvement, legal, Human Resources (HR), financial, accounting and governance, as well as industry and business.

As we continue to grow, we seek to offer high quality central services, such as finance, HR and estate management, which will improve efficiency and achieve cost-savings across all of our schools.

Our Vision for Growth

The growth of AMAT will be aimed at expanding the role our schools play at the heart of their communities. Our desire is always to drive up aspirations and outcomes for as many children as possible. By pooling academic, extracurricular and enrichment opportunities across our schools, our students and staff will not only have access to new and innovative academic resources but also to uplifting and supportive communities of like-minded individuals and leaders who can support their self-discovery. Scaling up to this level will be particularly important as we continue to support more students across all Key Stages who will have different academic needs, interests and abilities. We are particularly keen to use our resources to develop the best possible range of support for students who require Alternative Provision for some or all of their timetable.

As the Trust seeks to take on more schools across all Ofsted categories, continued leadership development and succession will underpin the development of the Trust's schools during the growth period. Strong and effective continuing professional development, as well as opportunities for staff to work creatively and collaboratively across the Trust's schools, will continue to be of the utmost importance as we remain steadfast in our commitment to growing the leaders of tomorrow. Our Teaching School has an excellent track record, offering NPQML and NPQSL qualifications to support highly effective leaders. This will be complemented by our excellent recruitment and retention practices which will not only enable us to continue bringing in brilliant teaching and leadership staff, but also extend to continuously recruiting high-quality members of the Trust Board as well as in our Local Governing Bodies.

Finally, AMAT seeks to find the appropriate economy of scale that allows for high standards of delivery alongside administrative efficiencies and local management. By further expanding the Trust's central services, we will be able to provide joining schools with excellent services in HR and finance that enable them to focus on improving their teaching and learning. Our central offer will benefit all joining schools, whether they are outstanding or in difficulty, by directly targeting the gaps in capacity at each school. Scaling up will also enable us to pool resources within the Trust, including through high quality procurement contracts. As we grow, we envision adding more school improvement practitioners to build our capacity and capability in school improvement projects.

Considerations for Growth

AMAT has carefully considered the provision, Key Stages and school designations it would like to encompass over the next five years. We have also considered our existing partnerships and the associate memberships we hold with other local trusts. We are keen to continue expanding our secondary offer throughout the Greater Birmingham and Solihull area, and are focused on incorporating mainstream primary schools and Alternative Provision (AP) schools into the Trust to build different expertise in our team of practitioners. At the current time, we seek to incorporate schools through the following routes:

1. Mergers and partnerships: we are currently exploring mergers with local Single and Multi-Academy Trusts, specifically around the possibility of bringing in AP provision.
2. Conversions: we continue to seek opportunities to bring in maintained and independent schools on the path to academisation to support the strong performance and standards at schools local to us, to the benefit of students and staff.
3. Sponsorship: we intend to work with sponsored schools by offering support and leadership to individual institutions or a cluster of schools within an underperforming trust. Our sound model for school improvement and expertise will help to support the strong performance and standards at schools local to us, to the benefit of students and staff. Where appropriate, we will then incorporate them into the Trust itself.

We consistently monitor and engage with schools who have indicated interest in joining the Trust in the future. Where expansion is through merger or conversion, it is vital that the joining school or trust culturally fits with AMAT. All schools that join must be dedicated to working in enthusiastic partnership to provide each pupil with an environment for achievement; getting the very best out of their lives; find enjoyment through learning and doing; engender community spirit; and ensure that each individual is valued. However, where a trust or school merges with or converts into the Trust, it is important also that their leaders retain their own vision for their school in the context of their community.

Coaching, mentoring, and supporting developing schools will contribute to the growth and reach of the Trust. The AMAT family of academies aspires to work intimately with joining schools to ensure that each has access to our high-quality management processes. We have excellent capacity to support and improve Good and Requires Improvement schools and will welcome Outstanding schools where they add capacity to the Trust – for example, we would be excited to welcome Outstanding primaries to build capacity in this area. We will evaluate schools in Special Measures on a case by case basis, with the aim of ensuring that they will not jeopardise the daily operations of the Trust and our existing schools. Our moral imperative drives us to prioritise schools that can further benefit from the value that we can add.

Financial performance is also an essential factor for AMAT to consider when bringing in a joining school or merging with a trust. To ensure the financial viability of our growth plan, we will prioritise schools and trusts with a minimum viable surplus but will also consider those with a projected deficit, as well as those currently in small deficit. The schools and trusts with large deficits or whose financial standing is unclear will have to be further evaluated with a detailed due diligence programme and then assessed by the Board of Trustees.

Growth Plan

Phase One: Short to Medium Term Growth (2020-2022)

Currently, the AMAT family of academies comprises four excellent secondary schools with similar strengths and within close proximity to one another. They are supported by leadership teams who have played significant roles in recovering Inadequate schools and are now able to release capacity to support more schools. To build success from success, we seek to expand our provision with schools that are geographically proximate to our current schools, with particular focus on

the Greater Birmingham and Solihull area. We hope to incorporate new or joining schools that are within a 45-minute drive. This will enable us to offer a cross-trust support system that is logistically manageable and help ensure that our network of leaders, experts and support services can be shared and developed further.

In the immediate stages of the first phase, we are keen to initially target and incorporate a further one to two secondary schools. In addition to these schools and based on the success of our associate membership with Solihull Alternative Provision Academy and Single Academy Trust, we are looking to discuss incorporating this provision into the Trust and thereby build our capacity in this area. We are also exploring opportunities to open a special free school through an upcoming national Wave competition, which we expect would open during the second phase of growth (2023 or later).

In this phase AMAT will also begin creating a cluster of primary schools by incorporating one to two Good and Outstanding local primaries whose values are strongly aligned with our own. The focus on strongly performing primary schools at this time will ensure that we bring excellent capacity and capability into the Trust and thereby lay the foundation to support schools in more challenging circumstances in phase two. Proximity to our existing schools will have an added benefit if they are feeder schools, with the intention of creating an 'all-through' experience for our pupils, helping to support excellent primary provision in the area.

It is important to note that AMAT has the capacity to take on underperforming schools at any time during both phases. We are not currently prescriptive about the type or designation of these schools as we are committed to supporting the provision of greatest need of our support. However, to ensure that the Trust has sufficient capacity to support a failing school whilst maintaining the excellent standard of provision at our current schools, we will not take more than one project at a time over the course of the next two years. Our hope would be that, at the completion of our terms supporting the schools, we will incorporate them into the Trust via academy sponsorship.

Phase Two: Long Term Growth (2023-2025)

We envision that this phase of growth will commence when AMAT has grown to be double our current size. At this time, we fully expect that the executive team will have significant experience in managing multiple school sites within geographical proximity to our original four schools. We also expect that the additional capacity and capability in the Trust and school leadership teams will enable us to take on more school improvement opportunities.

AMAT will continue to pursue opportunities to grow its secondary and primary provision in the geographical areas it has grown. We will consider every improving primary or secondary school in our geographical area of interest that would receive significant benefit in joining the Trust. This will be done either through supporting underperforming existing schools or incorporating improving secondary schools in the Greater Birmingham and Solihull area.

At this time, we will also reflect on the relationships we have built with local trusts and consider whether a merger would be beneficial for both organisations. We would be particularly interested in merging with a trust of a similar size and with similar provision. However, to broaden

our educational offer to all students who would benefit from being in an AMAT school, the Trust would also look to work in partnership or merge with a trust (or trusts) in this phase that have significant expertise in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). We seek to incorporate SEND schools across the Key Stages, particularly for students with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Severe Learning Disabilities (SLD) and physical disabilities.

Where we will have applied for a successful AP school in the national Wave competition, the school will likely open its doors in this phase of growth, probably in 2024 or 2025. With the success of that school's pre-opening, AMAT would look to take on future mainstream free school opportunities, particularly through the Local Authority presumption route. AMAT are aware, for instance, that Birmingham HMA have forecasted a windfall of housing supply leading into the second phases of the Trust's growth and can therefore look forward to presumed competition arising rapidly from a direct need for primary places near new housing developments.

At this point in our growth, the academies within the AMAT family are sustained and thriving from the supportive structures we have developed. Our overriding aim is that these structures will continue to be innovative, creative and cost-effective and to drive outstanding self-improvement into the future.

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Aspiration – Motivation – Achievement – Trust