

Accountability of multi-academy trusts

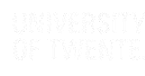
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Polycentric Inspections of Networks of Schools

- decentralized decision-making
- multiple actors have an active role in steering and governing schools

New tasks and responsibilities of Inspectorates of Education

This project compares cases of network-focused inspection and review practices across four countries: Bulgaria, The Netherlands, Northern Ireland and England.



<http://www.schoolinspections.eu>

Accountability of a multi-academy trust in England

Exploratory case study:

How external accountability impacts on the functioning and performance of an inter-organizational network.

Longitudinal data set over five and a half years

External Accountability Actors

Trust/central staff

Academies and free school in the trust

Interviews with:

- National School Commissioner and Regional School Commissioner
- Group interview with 6 HMI (including lead inspector of FI)
- Ofsted director of education policy

Analysis of:

- Outcome letter of FI year 5
- DfE notice letters to academy trusts about poor or inadequate performance or weaknesses in safeguarding, governance or financial management (pre-warning notices to 2 academies)
- RSC websites

Interviews with:

- ICEO of the trust

Analysis of:

- Website
- 5 annual reports
- Articles of association
- Master funding agreement
- Register of local governing bodies
- scheme of delegation in year 5

Interviews with:

- 6 headteachers of schools inspected as part of the FI

Analysis of

- Website
- all Ofsted school inspection reports since conversion to academy status of all the schools that were part of the Trust between years 1-6

Variables

External accountability

Internal quality control:

- Information mechanism
- Switching mechanism
- Exclusion mechanism
- Control mechanism

Network properties:

- Governance
- Size and growth
- Composition

External accountability events

- Expansion – regular school inspections
- Focused inspection and MAT review in first half of year 5. MAT review in second week after FI – included interviews with central staff

FI report:

- the headteacher performance management needs to include targets on the performance of vulnerable groups, and the development of a coherent cross-trust strategy to improve the support of, and provision for these pupils.

External accountability events

RSC monitoring of schools:

- From 2014 onwards monitoring expanded to include academies ‘failing to deliver good education’.
- The Trust discussed with the respective RSCs the possibility of a restructuring of the Trust schools in order to make the schools more geographically coherent.
- There is no public record of monitoring activities and visits of the RSC or their educational advisors
- Lack of framework for RSC visits (the DfE) caused anxiety and confusion in schools

External accountability events

RSC monitoring of the Trust:

- The CEO of the Trust and financial director (from 2014 onwards) have termly meetings with the RSC
- Risk analysis of key stage test performance data, predictions for future performance, pupil numbers in each school and Ofsted grades.
- High risk schools are visited by (RSC related) advisors,
- Or discussions with the EFA are brokered in case of budgetary problems.

External accountability events

The schedule of inspections and and RSC monitoring of individual schools focuses **on individual school performance** through inspections

“well obviously it’s a benchmark isn’t it, it’s a marker for them [the Trust] to know how well their schools are doing. It’s...I’m going to say a status symbol but I don’t...well I do mean it, they do like to say we’ve got X amount of Outstanding schools, X amount of Good schools, of course they do, that’s how they are viewed by the outside world. So it’s important to them.” (Campanula Academy).

Information mechanisms

- The shift from an initial monitoring of financial and operational planning towards increased monitoring of curriculum, teaching and school performance
- Peer reviews, focusing on specific curriculum areas in schools, such as a school's English, Mathematics, or Science department.

Control Mechanisms

- central staff broker collaboration between schools – support by outstanding schools to failing schools, exchange of staff, or joint development of staff training
- Initially membership fees depended on Ofsted grade.
- Shit to ‘Trust money’ and not ‘school money’
- Support predominantly given to schools with an upcoming inspection or in special measures

Switching mechanisms

- Trust staff are deployed to work in schools struggling to fill vacancies, and the implementation of shared systems
- Collaboration is reinforced through the peer review programme
- Move from external consultants to in-house support for school improvement.

Exclusion mechanisms

- Reduction in the size of the MAT and reorganise along new regional cluster lines.
- The RSCs enabled the rebrokering of some schools into new MATs.

External accountability and changes to Network properties

Size and composition:

- Initial push by Govt to expand fast then in 2014 trend towards smaller MATs
- CEO finds support and improvement of secondary academies to be more challenging and complex 'entrenched'.
- Re-brokered schools

Governance

- Tighter central control following Ofsted recommendations
- Regional structure
- Shifting from financial/operational control to school improvement and performance
- Improvement boards
- Headteacher performance management

Governance

- *“I think that when I took up post I would describe the way that the schools had come into the trust as being one where they were encouraged to join, to affiliate to an organisation in a kind of a club type way. Whereas the way in which the government and policy has moved is that the accountability, the lines of accountability, are much more sharper and clearer than they were even two years ago. So the MAT have had to take more central control of their schools, and that’s been a very, very difficult cultural change for some of our schools, because that’s not the trust that they joined.”*

Conclusions

- single member accountability can prevent network development
- structure of strong hierarchical control around the framework used to hold individual members to account
- Ofsted school inspections structured and informed the internal quality control, governance and size of the MAT
- A lack of alignment in single member and network-level accountability creates tensions

The way forward for inspecting networks

- accountability of networks should not be built on standardized pre-set frameworks
- Inspectorates (and other accountees) need to:
- Capture the mechanism and conditions that explain the functioning of the network
- Adapt to local context and type of network
- Create the conditions for network to steer itself
- Multiple levels of analysis (individual, interpersonal and collective)

Thank you!

- Questions?

Further information


The EU project:

<http://www.schoolinspections.eu>

The Centre for Educational Evaluation and
Accountability:

educationalevaluation.net


Interactive map of polycentric inspections

Share your exampleThis Interactive Map is part of schoolinspections.eu

Dimensions

This interactive map presents examples of inspections of educational networks, such as networks of schools (under a school board) or networks for inclusive education. You can search for examples by country, or by the following three dimensions:

- ✓ **Methodology** ?
- ✓ **Valuing and judgement** ?
- ✓ **User involvement** ?

 Search by keyword or country... 