



Diocese of Salisbury Academy Trust

'Beyond expectations for all of God's children'

Belonging to DSAT – A Headteacher's Perspective

Following a recent inspection, the DSAT Academy Improvement Team and CEO received an email from Andrew Brown, Headteacher of Spetisbury CE Primary School. With Andrew's permission, we have captured his email here to give colleagues who may be interested in joining the Trust, a clear view of what it means to a Headteacher in DSAT.

Dear All,

I would like to sincerely thank you all for the support and challenge that you have given over the last few years, and I know you will continue to give into the future. At every level, we have felt the support was there, be that someone being on the end of an email or phone call, or someone to come in and just check or quality assure something that we were doing. The work that you had all previously put in allowed the inspection to be so straightforward. Long gone are the days of pizza parties and pulling an all-nighter to get books marked and displays up. Your very presence was appreciated by all and it allowed everyone to see again your warm compassion and humanity.

I know I will miss something, but I would like to give recognition to your processes and ethos. In no particular order...



The Headteacher Board meetings are an incredibly valuable time for leaders for so many different reasons. I don't know if it is ever taken for granted but the ethos and 'vibe' within these meetings is very special. In other Trusts or local authority meetings I have experienced, it is not like that. My previous experiences have been of cliques, the whispering tables, the lack of trust and just an over-powering competitive nature from some. Of course, it can knock you back sometimes when you see something amazing that someone has done but in DSAT, it is always followed up by someone genuinely offering their time and support to help you implement similar. The meetings are also a chance to step away from school and network with other Headteachers; to have a sounding board for issues or plans. The content and information shared is obviously a key part of the meetings; in particular the information sharing around OFSTEDs has been hugely beneficial. The collective experience and expertise in the room is what makes the days so powerful and knowing that people will freely give this wisdom to others. So, however this was created, I doff my cap.

The Academy Improvement Meetings have definitely been the definition of a process. Each step along the way has moved us closer to this particular end point. I know at times it has felt that we have taken a few backward steps but sitting in the middle of this, it has been clear that we had to make certain moves to gain the greater clarity. The focus that you have given us but also the opportunity it gives us to step back and see how staff would perform is also integral to the process. The advice was never a complete diktat and so allowed us to find a way that worked for the team. As Jo knows, there were some that needed to overcome their own distrust to really understand that everyone's intention was about the children. That takes me back to the meetings that our previous smaller Trust held with prospective bigger Trusts and how Mark seemed to be the only prospective voice talking clearly about 'the children'. It is the glue that binds us all. This is really clear in all you do. It never feels like an action is to keep OFSTED happy – the purpose is clear.



The closer working on certain areas, such as Jane working with us to shore up our decision making around EYFS and Year 1 readiness, have also been a cornerstone of what we have then built. I know that those conversations were difficult at points, but I know there was the mutual understanding that once again we were doing it for what we believed would be right for the children. I am sure there were easier meetings to choose or book in but the unbridled passion for the education of children once again permeates through every interaction. This passion explains why we were also so keen to call on each of your expertise because although conversations could get challenging, we knew that the conversations would be appropriately focused and challenge our own thinking and reasoning.

The Collaborative Professional Learning network of support has really grown legs as it has evolved. The confidence with which subject leaders are now approaching the in-school improvement, has been empowering for all. The resources that have been provided have been of a high quality that they can use; additionally, the theoretical understanding that underpinned it and was then expertly shared was clearly understood by my team. Delivering a package that fits so many different settings is amazing and so although not every shot hits every target, there is enough quality that the hits outweigh the few misses. Again, the ability to network and come together with collective purpose is the biggest reward. Attending a few of them and having to juggle other bits in the background meant that I couldn't always be fully involved but there would always be a PowerPoint slide I would screenshot to use or a key point that I would action. So please know that they have been essential and welcomed by all. We look forward to the continued evolution.

The Forum Hub are all beautiful people with a real blend of every leadership style. I haven't mentioned the pandemic mainly because it seems so far away now that we want to look forward, however that time epitomises your approach. It is all that you have given to our school that has resulted in our secure standing.

Having talked with other Heads who have been through inspection recently. I had been confused as to why they weren't completely overcome with lethargy and the view that they had at least a month to chill. However, having gone through it, I get it! The whole process has strengthened resolve, it has affirmed plans that I just needed a seal of approval on. No laurels are being rested on. I know that we have lots still to do but it has all become very clear as to how we can do it and why we should do it. We do not accept the substandard, we want the better world but just needed to arrive at this complete point of clarity. I am very excited about the next 4 years.

There are so many more in the Trust that I could thank such as the different teams involved in the finance and business side of things, but I would like to give a big thank you to Nicki and Siobhan in the office, who I know are the glue that tie all of the above together. Their politeness and efficiency when trying to pull things together is always appreciated as I know that they have to try and work around many different leaders with many different ways of working and all with their own important agendas or to do lists. They are both incredible! To your new colleagues, just in case they needed confirmation, they have joined a team that makes a real difference and is greatly appreciated.

Kind regards,

Andrew Brown
Headteacher



Spetisbury
CE Primary School