



Growing pains and tight budgets

Digital transformation for
multi-academy trusts



APOGEE
An HP Company

Contents

03 FOREWORD

08 KEEPING IT FIT
FOR PURPOSE
AS TECHNOLOGY
CHANGES

04 UNDER PRESSURE
ON ALL SIDES

09 SECURITY

05 THE CHALLENGES
INSIDE MATS

10 CULTURAL DIFFERENCES
AND CHANGE-
MANAGEMENT

06 THE MOVE TO A
MANAGED DESKTOP
SERVICES APPROACH

11 WHY APOGEE HAS
THE TRACK RECORD
TO PROVIDE MITS

07 HOW DOES
MDS WORK?

12 CONCLUSION

Foreword

Since they were introduced in the year 2000, academies have been at the forefront of efforts to improve educational standards in England free of local authority control.

There are now more than 10,000 academy schools in England and most (89%) are in multi-academy trusts (MATs) which were enabled by the 2010 Academies Act. In August 2023, there were 1,182 MATs of varying sizes. Some 64% of secondary schools are part of a MAT, and 40% of primaries.

MATs have been under pressure to expand while simultaneously struggling with the effects of constrained public funding, inflation, and fluctuations in the student population. Like all businesses, they need to achieve greater efficiency and economies of scale wherever possible.

IT is vital to this. As the foundation of digital transformation, it enables greater efficiency in school management. In classrooms, it prepares new generations for a world dominated by technology.

This eBook looks at how a Managed IT Services (MITS) approach will help transform IT for MATs, providing access to important new methods of acquiring the latest, fully-secure desktop devices at manageable costs. **Apogee works with a variety of trusts, some with more than 40 schools, including Ormiston Academies Trust, Lion Academy Trust, LEO Academy Trust, and Wessex Multi Academy Trust.**



Under pressure on all sides

Many MATs have been highly successful in raising standards, but the whole sector now faces new challenges. School rolls are declining in many areas, reducing income. **Central government has not only sought greater economies of scale from the sector, but also requested standardised governance, which is pushing smaller trusts to amalgamate with larger counterparts.** There is also uncertainty about the new government’s policy towards including MATs in the Ofsted inspection regime.

Many trusts have surpluses, but others are slowing growth to address their financial difficulties. The [Kreston UK Academies Benchmark Report 2024](#) says 47% of trusts have an in-year revenue deficit. Each trust’s mix of schools can have a significant impact on finances if there is substantial variation in resources and performance.

Although the Budget increased core school funding by £2.3bn per year, the Institute for Fiscal Studies says cost pressures will consume most of the uplift. The DfE will also receive £1.4bn for refurbishment or replacement of school buildings, and an increase of £300m for maintenance. The latter only amounts to about £15,000 per school according to the [Confederation of School Trusts](#).

In addition, the Budget’s increased employers’ National Insurance contribution requirements will put further pressure on MATs, as will the government’s emphasis on teacher retention.

Budgets are increasing, but so are cost pressures on MATs



The challenges inside MATs

Expansion and reorganisation mean that MATs face many challenges. Some comprise just a handful of schools, while others manage 50. They may have anything between 3,000 and 35,000 pupils, sometimes more.

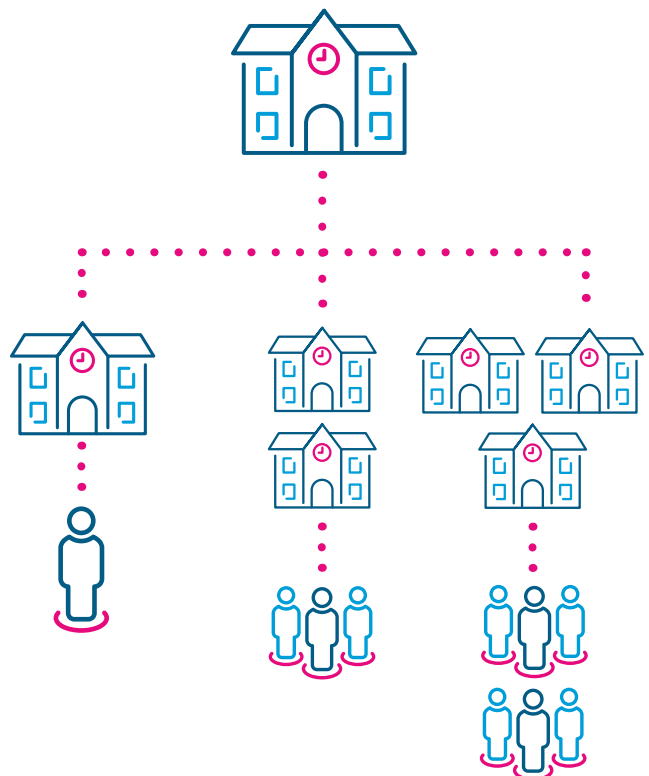
Trusts must allocate resources to schools (or top slice) in a way that is fair, which is difficult when newly-merged schools are under-resourced and need extra support. Despite its importance, IT is just one among many competing priorities. While government funding for digital transformation is welcome, it can strain the management capabilities of smaller trusts.

The move to rationalise operations, including IT, in an expanded MAT can result in a loss of flexibility and a sense of neglect in member schools that are geographically remote from the main hub. Where trusts have acquired under-performing schools, the resulting IT complexity eats up time and resources and harmonising IT becomes a struggle, particularly when expertise is in short supply. Some academies have only small IT teams and others rely on a mixture of interested teachers and third-party support that may be very limited.

Each academy school, however, wants a responsive service meeting its own needs, especially if it has a specialism.

Apogee knows from experience that the patterns of device-use vary from school to school. Some schools rent out laptops, while others provide all pupils with devices.

Rather than rolling upgrade programmes every five years, many academies are buying equipment each term in relation to immediate requirements, which is not a cost-effective or calculated strategy. **But at the same time, sustainability is also an important factor in every decision, including IT procurement.**



The move to a Managed Desktop Services approach

Having examined the different IT difficulties that MATs face, it is clear that a Managed Services approach to IT and desktop devices will deliver many advantages.

A MITS strategy removes many of the complications and much of the cost and time involved in procurement of devices, along with their provisioning, distribution, and set-up. These are significant tasks when devices serve thousands of students along with teachers and support staff across 20, 30, or 40 sites. A MITS provider will relieve MATs' IT staff of many of these irksome and time-consuming jobs.

How does Managed Desktop Services work?

MDS is delivered through subscription as-a-service, which is more cost-effective than ad-hoc buying. First, a MITS provider will conduct an audit of each academy and build a detailed picture of the devices in use, their condition, and purpose. With experience of many industries, a MITS provider knows which laptops or tablets are needed for each purpose.

The provider will then draft a planned programme of device acquisition, maintenance, and replacement –covering the entire lifecycle of the laptop or tablet. This ensures economies of scale and is an active approach to device management, saving substantial support costs.

It is also a highly flexible approach. The solution for some MATs, for example, may be to create a buying group within a trust to strike the right balance, with a preferred supplier such as Apogee. This gives academy schools a level of choice they need for their own specialisms or challenges.

A programme offered by Apogee, for example, means a MAT can adopt 500 laptops under a subscription agreement and pay less than market value. There is no up-front capital outlay, which is a major advantage for budgeting.

Experience of working with schools through long-standing provision of Managed Print Services (MPS) and Outsourced Document Services (ODS), means Apogee has schemes specific to the sector, such as HP Brighter Futures, which enables institutions to trade laptops and obtain money back to fund new equipment. As an example, a scheme including 200 laptops could see £20,000 put back into the school.

Apogee has helped MATs achieve cost-efficiencies while expanding fleets of devices. The Future Schools Trust in Kent, for example, gained new multi-functional devices across five sites as part of a MPS contract with Apogee – but at the same time, the trust also achieved savings of more than £120,000 and lower power usage.

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Keeping IT fit for purpose as technology changes

With innovation and resilience so important, a MITS contract is likely to achieve cost-savings while assuring a MAT that its devices remain up-to-date.



The need to upgrade to Windows 11 is the most obvious requirement at the time of writing. Migration to this upgraded operating system is necessary before October 2025 if the devices used by students and staff are to continue working effectively and securely.

Much legacy equipment will not cope with the upgrade, however. A MITS provider has the experience and knowledge to overcome such challenges and ensure each device is compatible with Windows 11.

But the gains are more far-reaching. **A typical MITS contract frees small IT teams from mundane device-management tasks, giving them more time to work on strategic adoption of new technology or innovative methods of teaching and communication.** They are certainly less reliant on the limited availability of their local IT support company.

Security

Enhanced security is vital because schools have very distinct data protection and safeguarding responsibilities governed by regulation. **The government’s 2024 Cyber security breaches survey found 52% of primary schools and 71% of secondary schools identified a breach or cyber attack over the previous 12 months.**

Although the survey report commends school leaders for greater cyber security awareness than is common among businesses, the percentages of attacks or breaches are higher than in the business sector. **Respondents from schools said budget constraints meant they could only achieve minimum cyber security requirements, even though the penalties for infringement are potentially severe.**

Worryingly, the use of guidance from external IT or cyber security providers was only 30% among primaries and 27% among secondaries, despite use of outsourcing.

Academy trusts face distinct hurdles in upgrading and harmonising security when they expand. Poorly-resourced schools are likely to have under-protected devices or systems.

A MITS provider has the necessary cyber security accreditations to a high level of competence and can offer sensible expert advice. Each device it supplies will come with a warranty and a security package as necessary.

Security can extend to remote monitoring to prevent devices being taken off-site for sale or misuse, for example. Apogee has experience in the field of school cyber security, from the security it applies to fleets of devices and their software, through to MPS contracts.

How many schools identified a cyber attack or breach in 2024?



52%
Primary schools



71%
Secondary schools

How many schools currently use external IT or cyber security providers for guidance?



30%
Primary schools



27%
Secondary schools

Cultural differences and change-management

Expansion and integration of schools into larger academy trusts can also test change-management. It is a question of achieving the right balance between the needs of MATs' boards and the requirements and cultural differences of newly-included academies.

In IT, management need full oversight and control of all assets. Yet, academies want to retain autonomy and receive fast responses when requirements change, or when equipment is damaged and needs repair or replacement.

A flexible MITS provider such as Apogee will deliver training and offer a direct contact for each academy if required. In addition, each trust or academy will have a dedicated liaison officer, ensuring someone is always available who knows the individual school and its requirements.



Why Apogee has the track record to provide MITs

Apogee can lay claim to being at the forefront of quality and cost-effectiveness in MITs.

For many years, it has been supplying MPS to educational institutions of all types and sizes, saving them significant amounts of cost and time through streamlined processes that deliver greater efficiency and security. The quality, efficiency, and security of printer fleets have gone up while costs have come down.

Building on this track record, Apogee is ready to work at scale with MATs and is committed to providing a highly reliable, customised service based on systematic understanding of customer needs.

A MITs partnership ensures MATs gain far more cost-effective, resilient, and less time-consuming access to high-quality laptops and devices for students, teachers, managers, and administrators, covering lifecycle management of hundreds or thousands of devices.

Conclusion

As they enter what may be a challenging period, MATs are facing many hurdles as a result of funding squeezes, inflation, poor buildings, expansion, and integration. Each of these comes with its own set of difficulties and intricacies.

We know the pressure on MATs to integrate under-resourced schools is likely to continue amid other changes in education. There is the risk of loss of students or de-academisation if things go wrong. At the same time the entire education sector knows it must advance digitalisation and prepare for the tech-driven future, which means IT in use every day must be of optimal quality and cost-effectiveness.

Moving to a MITS approach makes complete sense for MATs in the current climate. It is the most cost-effective way to transform IT and ensure it remains fit for the future and free of hassle.

Find out more about Apogee's Managed IT Services apogee.com/managed-it-services





An integrated, end-to-end IT solution empowers organisations to address the full range of evolving workforce demands. Apogee leverages over 30 years of experience in technology support and service delivery, combined with HP's cutting-edge innovation and security, to streamline operations and concentrate on their core business objectives. From proactively managing workplace technology to automating business processes, we deliver comprehensive IT services tailored to meet the needs of today's modern businesses.

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With over 30 years of expertise and innovation, our goal is to transform the way that organisations operate - and our unique approach provides clients with the perfect combination of secure print, document, and IT hardware and software to make their most effective flexible workplace a reality.

As an independent subsidiary of HP Inc., Apogee has the advantage of being part of a major technology manufacturer, with instant access to the latest innovations - all supported by industry-leading service operations.