



Baroness Barran

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The Duke of Wellington
House of Lords
London
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Dear Charles

Thank you for attending the Crossbench Peers' briefing on the Schools Bill on 8 June. You raised the important question of how to protect schools with a specialism, in particular maths schools and music and dance schools, within multi-academy trusts (MATs). I know that you have a particular interest as the patron of King's Maths School and am grateful to you for championing the maths school programme.

I would first like to reassure you that there is nothing in the Bill that would force an existing academy to join a MAT. 16-19 maths schools are already academies, and the Bill will not affect their current status. Similarly, music and dance schools are typically (non-academy) independent schools and so are outside of the scope of the provisions of the Bill relating to academies.

The Bill does include a power for local authorities to apply for academy orders in relation to maintained schools in their areas so that they can benefit from being part of a strong trust. Maintained schools may have developed specialisms in particular subjects, such as maths, music or dance, although there is no longer a process for formally designating them as specialist schools. I do recognise the importance of preserving the unique characteristics of specialist schools within a fully trust-led system. With that in mind, I can assure you that in the event that a local authority applied for an academy order in relation to a school with a particular specialism, the Regional Director would have regard to the capacity of the proposed trust to preserve and support the school's specialism.

While the Bill would not force an existing academy to join a MAT, we have consistently seen that schools in multi-academy trusts are 'stronger together' – it is this collective focus, vision and community that creates opportunities, facilitates collaboration, enables resilience and improves educational outcomes.

We know that there are many high performing standalone schools that have the

capacity to support other schools within the combined accountability of the MAT model. We also want more schools to benefit from the support that strong trusts can provide, and this will involve unlocking the capacity of some of the excellent leadership and practice that currently resides in those schools. For these reasons, I would strongly encourage maths schools and other schools with specialisms to consider forming and joining MATs. There is no reason why this should lead to any diminution of their strengths and unique character.

I hope that this addresses your concerns. I intend to place a copy of this letter in the library of the House.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Diana Barran". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

BARONESS BARRAN

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE