

Trust surveying - which approach fits your schools?

Much has been written about the spectrum of central control vs school autonomy in Multi-Academy Trusts and their schools. One of the best explorations of this complex question can be found in Matt Evans' thoughtful article, [What the centre holds](#). He gives an excellent tour of the issues facing leaders at MAT and school level, and makes it clear why no single approach will be right for all situations - or remain the same over time.

Surveying is a great example of one of the activities - both strategic and administrative - that Trusts may want to approach in a variety of ways. This article sets out the range: from fully Trust-led at one end of the spectrum to completely school-managed at the other, with two options in the middle. See which one fits you best.

This article also introduces a new feature, combined surveying, designed with two of our existing MATs and providing another way of supporting Trust alignment alongside individual school flexibility.

Trust-only surveying

We have several Trusts that have taken this approach. The Trust administers and distributes all surveys themselves or via our system. Surveying is usually managed by someone in the central team such as an HR Manager or an Improvement lead. This person may liaise with other Trust leaders to decide on the schedule and content of different surveys for the year, and is the key point of contact with the School Surveys team.

An overview of the year's plans might look like this example, imagined for the "Teacher Tapp Trust":

TEACHER TAPP TRUST Surveying Schedule - 2025/26						
	Autumn 1	Autumn 2	Spring 1	Spring 2	Summer 1	Summer 2
Trust survey - all school staff	Trust vision and policies		Trust check-in & communication			
Trust survey - all pupils		Belonging & community		Exam preparation / Attendance & wellbeing		Transitions / leaving reflections
Trust survey - all parents	Transitions & communications (end Sept)			Pupil experience & communications		

An editable template to support this type of planning can be found [here](#).

Each Trust-wide survey generates a Trust report, showing the overall Trust performance, as well as school comparisons within the Trust, and alongside each school's own Teacher Tapp driven national benchmarking data (matching their phase and FSM quartile).

The surveys also generate individual reports for each school, which can be accessed by the schools via their portal login. Some Trusts have chosen also to take responsibility for sharing the individual school reports with the schools rather than inviting the individual school leaders into their school's portal.

An advantage of this approach is its simplicity - both in administration and strategic alignment. That said, many Trusts also want individual schools to explore issues most pertinent to their situation, which is where a mixed approach may be useful.

Mixed Trust and school approach

This is currently our most common approach with Trusts, where the Trust runs a Trust-wide survey across its schools, and the individual schools also run their own surveys separately as they wish throughout the year.

Some Trusts run one annual survey; some run an autumn and summer survey; some even more frequently. Particularly with the more frequent surveying, we advise using a Surveying Schedule in order to help the Trust and schools plan and coordinate their surveying.

Complementary to this, individual school use of surveying allows school leaders to choose the frequency, style and content of surveying that suits them and the priorities that they are working on locally. We work with the Trust to ensure we do all we can to facilitate and support this - agreeing a plan for how to invite school leaders into the platform and providing online training sessions for groups or individuals.

Here's an example of a plan co-created by the Teacher Tapp Trust and one of its individual schools, School A:

TEACHER TAPP TRUST - SCHOOL A Surveying Schedule - 2025/26						
	Autumn 1	Autumn 2	Spring 1	Spring 2	Summer 1	Summer 2
Trust survey - all school staff	Trust vision and policies		Trust check-in & communication			
School survey - staff	Vision & policies (first fortnight)	Behaviour Barometer / SDP check-in	Job satisfaction & wellbeing	Professional development	Quick check-in (tbc)	Celebrating Successes & looking ahead
Trust survey - all pupils		Belonging & community		Exam preparation / Attendance & wellbeing		Transitions / leaving reflections
School survey - pupils			Student Voice			
Trust survey - all parents	Transitions & communications (end Sept)			Pupil experience & communications		
School survey - parents		SEND, attendance & support			General feedback	

Combined surveying - with editable Trust surveys

This new feature has been developed in partnership with a couple of Trusts and we expect it to become more popular with several of our other Trusts this coming year. The Trust sets a survey and invites the individual school leaders to preview it and add questions of their own if they wish to. For example, there may be something a school wants to track progress on from last year, or a strand of the SDP that feels particularly important to take views on. We recommend that the overall survey length remains manageable – much past 10-15 questions and you may have people struggling to get to the end.

Individual school leaders can also adjust the surveying window to suit their school. Whilst the end date for each surveying window is fixed by the Trust, at a school level they may want to nuance the start date and notifications, for example allowing for completion during staff meeting or training time.

Here is an example of a start of the year survey set by a Trust (on the left), with the additions an individual school has made (on the right):

Vision & Policies: Trust Survey

Questions ADD QUESTIONS

TRUST QUESTIONS

- 1 Taking everything about life at work into consideration, I am currently... ☐
- 2 A pupil discloses a safeguarding risk and asks you to keep it secret. Can you? ☐
- 3 Which of the following safeguarding incidents would you feel confident in dealing with? ☒
- 4 Thinking about your school's improvement / development plan, which of the following is true? ☒
- 5 Which of the following are true of your academy trust's vision? ☒

SCHOOL QUESTIONS

Click 'Add questions' to extend the survey

Vision & Policies: Trust Survey

Questions ADD QUESTIONS

TRUST QUESTIONS

- 1 Taking everything about life at work into consideration, I am currently... ☐
- 2 A pupil discloses a safeguarding risk and asks you to keep it secret. Can you? ☐
- 3 Which of the following safeguarding incidents would you feel confident in dealing with? ☒
- 4 Thinking about your school's improvement / development plan, which of the following is true? ☒
- 5 Which of the following are true of your academy trust's vision? ☒

SCHOOL QUESTIONS

- 6 Our school has a culture of learning: students are ready, willing and able to learn ☐
- 7 I am usually clear about what's going on around school – for example, what I need to do, and when ☐
- 8 I know what the school expects good teaching to look like ☐
- 9 Which of the following words would you use to describe your school's behaviour policy? ☒
- 10 The other thing I'd like to let the leadership team know is...

An advantage of this approach is that the Trust sets of the overall agenda and parameters to ensure important engagement milestones are met, whilst the school gets the chance to personalise to their situation without needing to manage the overall process. Respondents across the schools get one simple link to follow, allowing them to share their views for the Trust and the school without needing to complete multiple surveys.

There is still the option for separate Trust and/or school surveying as well. It could be that the combined approach is used only for certain times or types – for example, a staff survey across the Trust at the start of the year, or a review of parent experiences of SEND support across the Trust.

What does this look like in practice?

Here's an example of a Trust schedule before any schools have added their own plans:

TEACHER TAPP TRUST Surveying Schedule - 2025/26						
Survey type	Autumn 1	Autumn 2	Spring 1	Spring 2	Summer 1	Summer 2
Trust survey - all school staff	Trust vision and policies		Trust check-in & communication			
School survey - staff						
Trust survey - all pupils		Belonging & community		Exam preparation / Attendance & wellbeing		Transitions / leaving reflections
School survey - pupils						
Trust survey - all parents	Transitions & communications (end Sept)			Pupil experience & communications		
School survey - parents						

And here's an example of the same Trust's schedule, but with a suggested individual school plan woven into it:

TEACHER TAPP TRUST Surveying Schedule - 2025/26						
Survey type	Autumn 1	Autumn 2	Spring 1	Spring 2	Summer 1	Summer 2
Trust survey - all school staff	Trust vision and policies		Trust check-in & communication			
School additional questions OR separate survey - staff	Add 2-3 questions on own SDP priorities or own initiatives	Behaviour Barometer & SDP follow up	Add 2-3 questions to follow up on autumn questions	Professional Development	Quick check-in	Celebrating Successes & Looking Ahead
Trust survey - all pupils		Belonging & community		Exam preparation / Attendance & wellbeing		Transitions / leaving reflections (Y6/11/13)
School additional questions OR separate survey - pupils		Add 2-3 questions on priority issues, e.g. lunchtimes, behaviour	Own School Council led survey with pupils			Own School Council led survey (follow up)
Trust survey - all parents	Transitions & communications (end Sept)			Pupil experience & communications		
School additional questions OR separate survey - parents	Add 2-3 questions, e.g. views on wraparound options, lunches	SEND, attendance & support		Add 2-3 questions to follow up on key issues from autumn	Overall feedback (Ofsted template)	

School-only surveying

Finally, some Trusts have facilitated access to School Surveys for their schools but have preferred to leave surveying operating only at the individual school level. Below is an example of an individual school's surveying plan for the year ahead:

EXAMPLE Surveying Schedule - 2025/26						
	Autumn 1	Autumn 2	Spring 1	Spring 2	Summer 1	Summer 2
Staff	Vision & policies (first fortnight)	Behaviour Barometer / SDP check-in	Job satisfaction & wellbeing	Professional development	Pause! (Or run a quick check-in)	Celebrating Successes & looking ahead
Pupil		Belonging & community		Exam preparation / Attendance & wellbeing		Transitions / leaving reflections
Parent	Transitions (end autumn 1)		Communication		Pupil belonging & experience	

At its simplest, individual schools may like to download and edit [this template](#) to formulate their own separate plans. This recent blog post, [Successful Surveying: The Perfect Plan](#), is designed to support individual school leaders with thinking through their school's approach. Even in this scenario, the central team may like to use the Trust portal to have visibility of the surveys that schools run and the reports that are generated.

Support options and links

The templates and examples shown above are all contained within [this downloadable and editable spreadsheet](#).

And remember that the School Surveys team would love to try and support you in your unique scenario: as well as the resources and guidance above, we can also offer a listening ear, share our feedback on your plan and put you in touch with other MATs that may have had similar experiences.

Book a catch up to talk through your situation at a time that suits you. Please access our calendar [here](#).

All our schools and MATs are welcome to:

- Book free online training sessions for your MAT and/or school leaders by clicking [here](#)
- Visit the Help Centre (when you are in the portal), to find guides and advice on all aspects of surveying
- Call on 0330 043 4469 from 8am to 6pm during the working week
- Email us via hello@schools-surveys.com