Neoliberal tensions in the English education system: What factors influence schools' decisions about joining a multi academy trust?

Ian Dewes

A thesis submitted to Birmingham City University for the degree of Doctorate in Education in the faculty of Health, Education and Life Sciences, July 2021

Contents

Contents	pg. 2
Abstract	pg. 3
Chapter 1: Introduction	pg. 4
Chapter 2: Literature Review	pg. 16
Chapter 3: Methodology and Ethics	pg. 45
Chapter 4: Data and analysis from governor surveys	pg. 62
Chapter 5: Critical discourse analysis	pg. 79
Chapter 6: Data and analysis of interviews and minutes	pg. 95
Chapter 7: Conclusions	pg. 138
Bibliography	pg. 150
Appendices	pg. 171

Abstract

The academisation of schools has been a significant change in the English educational landscape and Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) are a particularly salient feature. While some schools have been forced to join MATs, most have made this change because their governing board has chosen to do so. Considering that (i) there have been numerous controversies connected to the MATs, (ii) there has been considerable opposition to schools leaving local authority control and (iii) the government has decided to not pass legislation forcing schools to academise, my research looks at the reasons why many governing bodies have still decided to join a MAT. In particular, I look at the neoliberal influences on the decisions of governing boards. I collect data across three different schools including a survey of the context in which the board governs, an analysis of the minutes of board meetings and conduct semi-structured interviews with governors. I use content analysis and discourse analysis to enrich my understanding of the data. I argue that MATs epitomise neoliberal values and I find evidence that the established theory (previously untested in this area of education) of neoliberalism persisting through the creation of crises, which in turn lead to more neoliberal policies, explains why many schools have joined MATs. I identify a powerful set of influences on decisions made in the case study schools and a normalisation of neoliberal traits in education which has the effect of making many governors feel that joining a trust is common sense from their perspective. However, I find evidence in the case studies where the progress of neoliberalism is disrupted by neoliberalism itself and this leaves in doubt the government's goal for a fully academised system.

Chapter 1: Introduction

My research builds on my experiences of working in education for nearly twenty years and in particular my experiences leading schools in various headship and governance roles. Working in education it is inevitable that I will make observations on developments and be curious as to why things are as they are. Other researchers undertaking a professional doctorate have described being motivated by curiosity and a quest for knowledge (Burgess et al. 2006) and also a frustration in what they see about them in their professional work (Wellington & Sikes, 2006). The curiosity and occasional frustration with my professional experiences is the starting point for this thesis. I have experienced the education system over the last two decades as a volunteer (governor), parent and professional and from each of these positions I have seen the education sector change as more schools become academies. Almost all of that experiences have been in the primary sector, where schools are smaller and in more recent years, there has been a focus on primary schools joining academy trusts, rather than becoming standalone academies. I have seen considerable opposition towards this trend, which begs the question why would a primary school join an academy trust? Later in this chapter, I will refine this further into two research questions.

In this introductory chapter I will give an account of the various ways I have experienced the education system. This statement of positionality lays the ground for the second part of this chapter where I make a series of observations on the challenges facing schools in recent years. This then leads to the establishment of my research questions.

Positionality

As a researcher it is important to explain the context in which I work and live and my personal experiences which influence my thinking. As Bourke writes, positionality informs our "own biases which shapes research" (Bourke, 2014:1). This research is focused on school leadership, particularly governance and is focused on recent changes to the school system. As someone who is engaged in the education sector, as a professional (executive headteacher for most of the duration of my

research), a volunteer (governor in a maintained school and a non-executive director in a Multi Academy Trust or MAT) and a parent of three school-aged children, I have a combination of perspectives which will influence my research. Professionally, for the first four years of studying (since 2016) for the Doctorate in Education I was the executive headteacher of two schools in Warwickshire. Towards the end of the course I became the Chief Executive Officer of a MAT. I read Politics and Social Policy as an undergraduate and had no intention of becoming a teacher, until in my second year I noticed how animated people got in a seminar on education policy. Teaching became an option as I realised how much it mattered to people, something which I valued in my career choice. I studied for a PGCE and began my career teaching in South Warwickshire. I moved to London and taught in a highly-disadvantaged part of North London and had some experience of senior leadership roles. I then moved back to Warwickshire and became a deputy headteacher before, four years later, becoming a headteacher, and after three years an executive headteacher, as well as a 'National Leader of Education' (NLE), a role where I support other schools. More recently, in January 2021 I became the CEO of a MAT.

I have a long-held interest in school governance which has led to me being a governor in schools other than where I work. In both the areas of headship and school governance there have been considerable changes in recent years. System leadership positions (where people play a leadership role in more than one school) have multiplied in order to build capacity in the system (Robinson, 2012). My CEO, NLE and executive head roles were ones that did not exist at the start of my career. In the field of governance, structural changes to the school system have led to additional layers of school governance in the academy sector (Baxter, 2016). In one role I held from 2012-2015, I was a governor in a school which became part of a MAT. I saw my role as a governor and that of my fellow governors, reduced as powers moved up towards the board of the MAT. I am also a director in another MAT and so have seen what it is like to be making decisions across a group of schools, where once it would have been each individual setting or the local authority making such choices.

I have been struck by the different socio-economic contexts in which I have worked (from affluent semi-rural Warwickshire to disadvantaged South Tottenham). This is not as simple as contrasting two different locations - there is poverty in both areas. If anything, the rare child living in deprived

circumstances amongst affluent peers has been more striking than the experience of working in London where disadvantage was commonplace. I have wanted to be a teacher to 'make a difference' and I have come to consider there to be an opportunity to make even greater differences with pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Successive governments have professed to seek greater social justice through a range of policies (Robinson, 2012). Under the Labour governments of 1997 to 2010, initiatives such as Every Child Matters (improvements in multi-agency working) and Sure Start Centres (a one-stop shop for family support in deprived areas) aimed to help many children from the poorest of backgrounds (Abbott et al. 2013). Since 2010 policies such as free school meals for infants and pupil premium funding for 'disadvantaged' children did not discernibly differ from the preceding administration (ibid.). Ostensibly all governments would want to help the most disadvantaged, just as I suspect all teachers or headteachers would want to make a difference. Michel Foucault, a philosopher who I will return to throughout my thesis, concerns himself with the process of problematisation; that is how it is arrived at that a certain thing is a problem. Ball applies this to education policy, which he says is the history of the problematising of education (2013:27). Given that achieving social justice through education is an aim shared by different political parties, perhaps the real problem for a political party is to do something that the electorate might consider to be of value. I would argue therefore, that the challenge for the education professional is how to do something which they themselves might consider to be of value, regardless of the political policy climate of the moment.

On the other hand, I work in a state funded institution, so I think it would be unrealistic if I did not expect to be influenced by education policy set at a national level. This policy in turn is influenced by political views. This link between policy and political view point is often considered to have become stronger after James Callaghan's 1976 speech on education. Responding to increasing public concern over an education profession with, by today's standards, remarkable autonomy, the then Prime Minister called for greater government involvement in the education system, so that it could serve the needs of the economy (Simon, 1991). Since then, the government of the day has frequently seen education as a key policy area.

The move towards viewing education in terms of the economic benefits occurred as neoliberalism took root in the political mindset. Associated with the thinking of Milton Friedman, Freidrich Hayek and Robert Nozick, neoliberalism is generally considered to "present the market as the most efficient way of organising society" (Ryan, 2016:81). Gunter describes the neoliberal position as being one where investing in public services is justified by the fact it helps to service the economy and protect capital accumulation. All activity is to be costed and compared against value-for-money measurements (2012). This is a strong influence on my day-to-day professional life; OFSTED expect me to ensure that in the schools I lead there is effective "curriculum and careers advice so that all children and learners get a good start and are well prepared for the next stage in their education, training or employment" (2015:12). As an NLE I am expected when I am supporting a school to use the government's Strategic Resource Management tool to ensure that resources are being used efficiently. An economic perspective on education is at the forefront of the government's mind.

As well as an education professional, there is another aspect of my relationship with the education system; my role as a parent. I have three sons, aged between ten and fourteen who have all attended the same primary school in Rugby. The school is in an area of town with high levels of disadvantage. Many pupils have only been in this country for a short period of time and are in the early stages of learning English. Within the first four years of my oldest son being at the school, there had been four different headteachers, creating considerable uncertainty for the school. Standards, as defined in the results of nationally set tests, were low and OFSTED graded the school as 'requires improvement'. Research has shown that schools in disadvantaged areas are less likely to get a 'good' or 'outstanding' judgement than those who are based in more affluent areas (Hutchinson, 2016:15). During this period, I moved schools myself and became a headteacher. I noticed that children living close to me, in one instance, just three doors from my own home, chose to go to my new school on the edge of town, rather than their local school where my children went. Presumably influenced by the school's OFSTED judgement, parents were 'voting with their feet' and not attending their local school.

Wilkins describes how neoliberalism has reframed the relationship between parents and schools. It is now a relationship between "consumers and producers" (2012:165) and parents are choosing

'providers' as they might a supermarket or utilities provider. It is perhaps doubtful that parents would be aware of the aforementioned relationship between poor economic areas and poor OFSTED outcomes. I would point out that there is no guarantee of consumers being well informed, something which is crucial if the market is to be effective. The approach of some parents dismayed me; my wife and I wanted the school to improve, but we did not see how taking our children out of it would help to achieve that. Rather than viewing the school as a business that should be judged by market forces and liable to be closed down, we saw the school as a valuable part of the community. We volunteered for the PTA and governing body, helping where we could. At the same time, in my day job I was educating children who had shunned my children's school and travelled across town to be educated in a school with a better reputation. (The school where I was headteacher serves an elderly catchment area, meaning there are only enough children in our area to fill half the places, so it is common for the school to have children from further afield.) I felt uneasy about the way people had crudely applied the approach of the consumer to choosing a community service. This had the effect of making improvements at my children's school harder. Pupil numbers went down and with it funding. I noticed that the parents most likely to leave were professional, middle class parents, whose children were perhaps more likely to achieve highly in tests on which the school was held accountable. A reduction in the number of pupils on roll also had the effect of making the school take children who had been excluded from other settings, children with high levels of special educational needs and children new to the country who could not speak English. Meanwhile, popular schools which were full could turn such pupils away as they had reached their stated pupil admission number. Market forces created a vicious circle.

Despite such frailties in the application of market principles to the education system, I have little choice but to work within this policy context. Foucault offers the analysis of how, what he terms, 'biopolitics' has led to government exercising control of whole populations in aspects of human life (Foucault et al. 2007). In this analysis the individual has autonomy, but within specific limits and boundaries (ibid.). Working within what could be considered a neoliberal orthodoxy (although I will examine the fragility of this neoliberalism in the literature review chapter), I was professionally obligated to honour the choice of parents who shunned their local school regardless of my personal feelings. My job was to welcome them into my school and do my best to make sure their children

were educated to a high standard. I found it particularly trying that if I was successful in this, I would be vindicating their actions. I was forced to put my ideals to one side and take a pragmatic approach.

Observations of changes facing schools

Schools have experienced a number of significant changes in recent years and the starting point for my research is my understanding of these changes as experienced through my various roles in education. This chapter will introduce three issues which will feature throughout my thesis:

- The growth of academies and the decline of local authorities
- Neoliberal influences on school governance and how some have argued that school governance is more challenging than it has been before
- The financial constraints experienced by school, particularly in respect of the period of austerity following the 2008 financial crisis

1. The growth of academies and the decline of local authorities

The first issue I will focus on is the academisation of much of the school sector. Over the last fifteen years many schools have changed their status to academies, leaving local authority control. Started by the Labour government in the early 2000s, academies are more independent from the local authority than other schools; they have "freedom from local authority control; the ability to set their own pay and conditions for staff; freedoms around the delivery of the curriculum, and the ability to change the lengths of terms and school days" (DfE, 2013a). In this context, academies can be seen as a continuation of government policy stretching back to the 1980s, where local management of schools and grant-maintained status gave many schools more freedom from their local authority than they had had before (Abbot et al. 2013). By the end of the last Labour government in May 2010 there were 203 academies with this accelerating to 4,515 six years later under subsequent governments (BBC, 2016). The academy system has coincided with reduced budgets for LA and reduction in role. This has meant power has increasingly shifted upwards to central government and downwards to schools with local authorities becoming relatively marginalised (Connolly, 2017). The politics of the school system has been reconfigured; the government depoliticised the

system by removing power from the local authorities and then repoliticised by creating new levers of control through the actions of leaders in academies (Wilkins, 2016a).

The introduction of academies has not been without controversy (Machin & Vernoit, 2012). There have been a number of protests and acts of resistance with organisations such as the Local Schools Network and the Anti Academies Alliance continuing to run campaigns against academies. Some of the unhappiness with academies relates not just to the status of the school, but the way schools are run compared to maintained schools (that is, those schools which are under the control of local authorities). Baxter (2016) and Wilkins (2016a) argue that where schools become part of a trust, or Multi-Academy Trust (MAT), they lose some autonomy to the central function of the trust and this has led to some resistance and protest. I would argue that resistance has been made harder because the rationale behind academies has shifted over time and been moulded into the policy of different political parties. Rayner outlines four waves of academisation, starting with the preceding institutions, City Technology Colleges and the Thatcher Conservative government in the late 1980s, progressing to New Labour's Education Action Zones and public-private partnerships of the 2000s. It was then made possible for more schools to convert to academy status, at times it was aimed at under-performing schools and other points the policy was designed to encourage 'outstanding' schools to become academies (2017). The coalition government of 2010 to 2015 means that all three major political parties (Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat) have at some point played a role in the expansion of the academy programme.

2. Neoliberal influences on school governance

With the academy system being characterised by the aforementioned depoliticisation (removal of power from local authorities) and repoliticisation (new power being given to leaders in academies) it is important to understand where the new power lies. The academy system has led to an increase in the layers of governance (Smith & Abbott, 2013). Whereas before there was a governing body in each school, in a MAT there are usually local governors, a trust board, who govern across the MAT and 'members' who have a small range of specific duties, such as appointing the trust board and being "guardians of the trust's governance" (National Governance Association, 2019). Below, figure

1.1 shows a structure commonly used in MATs. Note the new levels of governance used in a MAT: Members and boards of directors/trustees, whose roles have gradually evolved as the system has become more mature. These have led to a reduction in the responsibilities held by governors at local level. At the centre of MATs are two groups, those who work for the MAT, the executive leaders, sometimes known as Chief Executive Officers and sometimes executive headteachers or executive principals. There are also those who are not employed by the MAT, but give their time voluntarily to the governance of the organisation. They are sometimes known as trustees and sometimes directors. Some have argued that this shift in power has led to a reduction in democratic accountability (Baxter, 2016) and an attack on democratic representation (Wilkins, 2017). Some are less critical, claiming that MATs are "a new form of civic structure" who should be "working with other civic actors to advance education for the public good in their locality" (Confederation of School Trusts 2019:3).

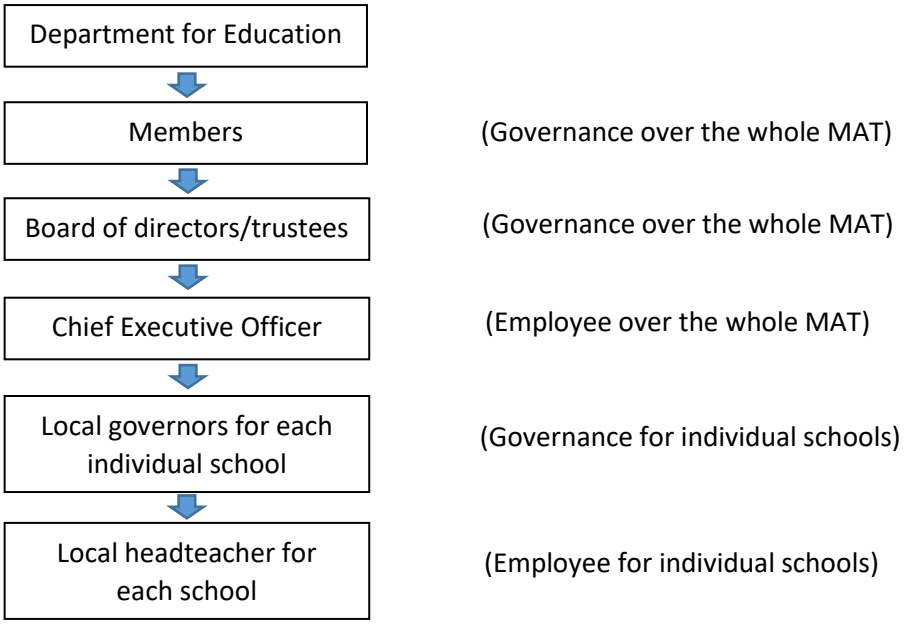

Figure 1.1: Typical structure of a MAT

There have been other developments to school structures which sit outside of MATs, but have a similar effect in terms of centralising governance and other leadership. Federations of schools have become relatively common in the education system, typically existing on a spectrum of hard to soft, whereby a hard federation involves centralising the governance function into one board and the soft option retains local governance (Chapman, 2011). In federations it has been noted that

governors face increased accountability measures, as is the trend in the school system more generally (Connolly, 2017).

While legally the responsibility for the running of the trust lies with the central board of directors or trustees, they are able to choose to delegate powers to others, be them employees or those involved in governance (NGA, 2020d). How much they do this depends largely on the size of the trust, with smaller organisation more willing to delegate responsibility (Allcroft, 2016). Commonly, the most significant powers are held at the centre and this can often lead to tensions between those at the centre and those who work locally in individual schools (Baxter & Cornforth, 2019). A particular feature of the academy landscape are MATs which have grown out of one successful school. The Dixons Academy Trust, which has fourteen schools, grew from just one, Dixons City Academy. This MAT has codified a specific approach to running schools, based on the founding headteacher's principles and this has been rolled out across all the schools, reducing local autonomy (Dixon's OpenSource, 2020).

3. The financial constraints (post 2008 financial crisis)

Over recent years money has become an increasing focus in educational debate. Schools are said to have been under increasing financial pressure. Reports of difficulties which schools have faced have been consistently recorded. For example, there was a mass march to Downing Street by 2,000 headteachers in 2018 (School Cuts, 2018). In my own professional experience, the schools I have led have reduced teaching staff in recent years. In the MAT where I am a non-executive director, we have been encouraged by a Department for Education consultant to review staffing in all of the schools in the trust after numbers, such as the pupil to teacher ratio were compared against national metrics. All schools were said to have inefficiencies which needed to be corrected in order to save money. The Department for Education (DfE) have claimed that schools are well funded, for example, claiming that English schools receiving the third highest levels of funding in the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) – a claim rebuked by the UK Statistics Agency (Norgrove, 2018).

Financial constraints are having a significant impact on schools. While I have noticed challenges across all schools I know, one school I have previously worked at stands out as being particularly vulnerable. This is because of its size – pupil numbers are about fifty. The DfE commissioned research which culminated in a report which made suggestions about how small schools can continue to survive. One of the key recommendations was for them to join a MAT or share a headteacher with another school (2019). Research has shown that balancing the budget is the greatest challenge faced by school governors, (see figure 1.2).

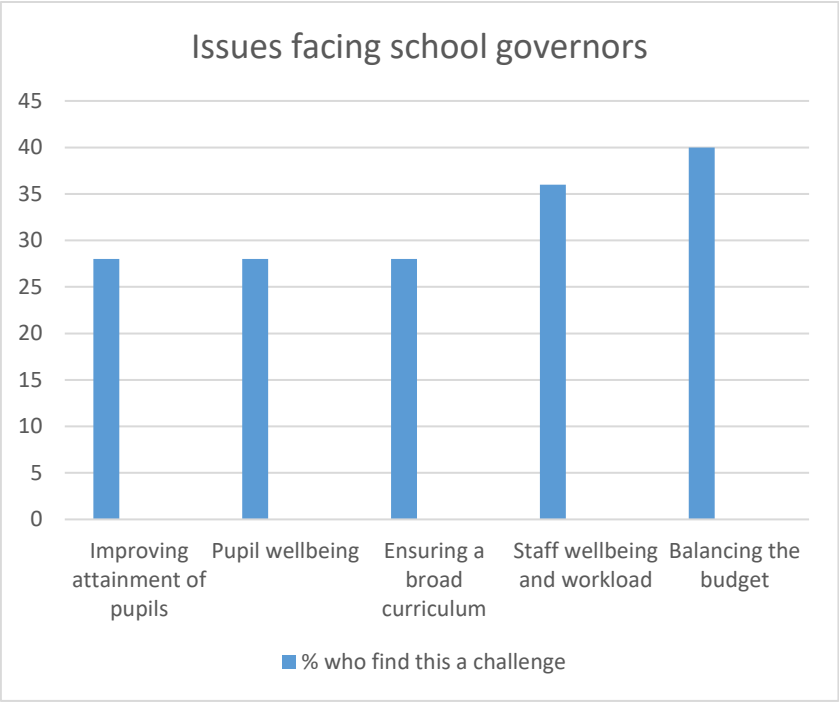

Figure 1.2 (NGA, 2020a)

The influence of OFSTED can be seen here; the latest iteration of the OFSTED Inspection Handbook has increased the focus on pupil and staff wellbeing, staff workload and ensuring pupils are taught a broad curriculum. The same survey revealed that the challenge of finance is felt more keenly by schools who are not in academy trusts.

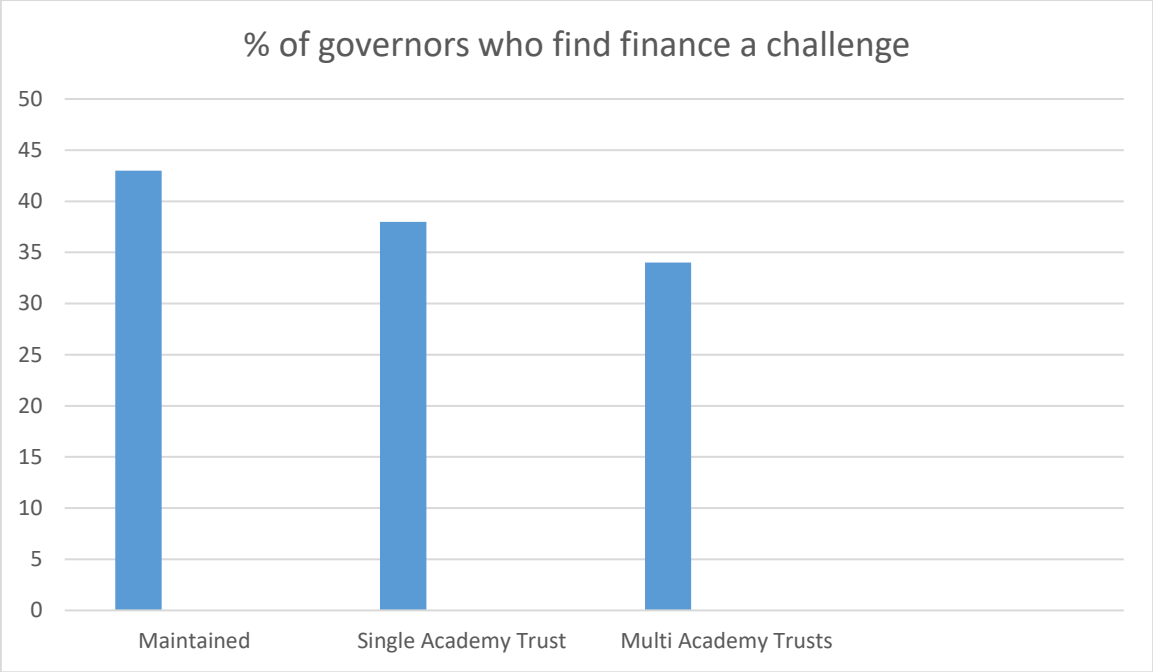

Figure 1.3 (NGA, 2020a)

Research questions

Figure 1.3 suggests that if finance is a challenge, then joining a MAT could be a solution. This could also be said of the other two challenges noted: the increased responsibilities on governors with regards to accountability for pupil outcomes and OFSTED inspections, can be shared, or even given to, leaders in a MAT. If LAs are being run down by the government, then it makes less sense for a school to stay maintained. This suggests the possibility of the neoliberalism creating tensions in the education system where the demands placed on schools, and particularly governors, are such that joining a MAT becomes a good option.

My professional experiences have led me to be acutely aware of the challenges facing schools today. From my perspective, the decline of local authority services has drastically changed the context within which schools operate. The austerity under which schools have been financed over the last ten years has created significant difficulties for schools. Through my work with school governors, and my own governance roles, I have also lived through significant change. Like my experiences of parents choosing schools the not-so-invisible hand of neoliberalism can be detected in all of this change and challenge. My research is aimed at understanding the role of neoliberalism in the

current education climate and in particular whether it creates a climate which encourages schools to follow the government's preferred route and convert to academy status. Given the critique of academisation evident in the literature cited above and that in the case a school joins a MAT, such a decision leads to that school giving up many of the powers held by the governing board and the headteacher, I am interested in why governing boards choose such an approach. More specifically my research questions are:

- What are the neoliberal tensions in the academisation of schools?

- What are the factors influencing the decisions of individual schools when considering joining a MAT?

As the literature review in the next chapter will show, the questions above will cast light on areas that have been neglected by research. They will also satisfy my curiosity about the issues I see challenging schools, day-in, day-out, in my professional career and whether these tensions are connected to the decision by many schools to become academies. My research focuses on primary schools, as this is the area I have had greatest experience in. As they are smaller than secondary schools there is a greater expectation that primaries would join a MAT, rather than create a standalone academy.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

I begin by reviewing the literature on academies and the academisation of the English school system, followed by the political ontology which has influenced academisation - neoliberalism. I then write about two areas associated with neoliberalism, the role of crises in the paradigm's continued existence and Michel Foucault's concept of 'governmentality', a theoretical tool I plan to use. Finally, I focus on three areas outlined in the introductory chapter which I argue that neoliberalism is influencing: School governance, the role of local authorities and school finance.

Academies

Academies are independent, non-selective, state-funded schools that fall outside the control of local authorities (Machin & Vernoit, 2012). A key feature is that they are funded directly by central government instead of receiving their funds via a local authority (BBC, 2010). Initially academies were meant as a solution to schools which were deemed to be failing or underperforming. Often these schools were in the most challenging urban secondary school settings. The Labour government of the time sought a 'third way' of merging practice from the public and private sectors in the hope that the public sector would become more "innovative and entrepreneurial" (Woods et al. 2007:238). Over time academies came to be viewed by successive governments as a systemic change to the education landscape that can be used to raise educational standards in all schools (Salokangas & Chapman, 2014:373). In figure 2.1, Rayner organises the history of academy schools into four 'waves' to create a historical timeline which stretches from the 1980s to the present day:

Wave	Government	Years	Wave was characterised by…
Wave 1	Conservative	1986-1997	Certain types of schools were created (Grant Maintained and City Technology Colleges). Although not academies, they share some of the features, e.g. they were independent of local authorities.
Wave 2	Labour	1997-2010	The legislation introduced by the Conservative government during Wave 1 is used by Labour to create City Academies. These initially replaced schools which were deemed to be failing, but from 2004 academies were used where there was a shortage of school places and from 2005 all schools were promised the chance to have academy-style freedoms.
Wave 3	Conservative and Liberal Democrats in coalition	2010-2015	Only a month after a new coalition government was formed new legislation was passed by parliament which expedited the process of becoming an academy. This led to a rapid increase in the number of academies and the realisation of the 2005 pledge that all school schools could become academies.
Wave 4	Conservative	2015 - 2017	In 2016 the government announced that by 2020 all schools will be academies or in the process of converting to academy status. Whereas individual school routinely became academies (effectively single academy trusts) the focus in Wave 4 was for all but the largest of schools to join existing MATs.

Figure 2.1 (Rayner 2017:22-33)

Since Rayner's timeline was written, the number of schools converting has slowed and there has been considerable variation across the country (Gill & Janmaat, 2019). This possibly constitutes a change in policy significant enough for a fifth wave. The 2016 policy of all schools becoming academies was dropped, but the government continued to talk positively about the benefits of academy status, but the emphasis has shifted to "building capacity in the school system" and encouraging schools to become academies voluntarily (DfE 2018b). Part of the reason for this change in approach may be due to the difficulties in finding sufficient MATs willing to take on further schools, with certain schools e.g. small rural schools, finding it difficult to become academies (NAO 2018). Another factor in this 5th wave in the development of academies is the size of MATs. 64% of academy trusts only have one or two schools (Confederation of School Trusts 2021a) and

this has led for calls for a focus on merging smaller trusts. Sir Jon Coles, the CEO of the country's largest MAT, United Leaning, has called for more larger trusts because of the economies of scales possible (2021). With many trusts already in existence, but typically of a relatively small size, the focus is likely to be increasingly on smaller trusts merging, or larger trusts cannibalising others. There is no research on this currently, but anecdotally, I have come across many references in to this in my professional life. A driver for growth in the MAT I work for was a fear among the directors that we would be vulnerable to being taken over by a larger trust. A new and under-researched area is the merging of academy trusts.

There has been much debate around academies. Successive government have argued that two of the main advantages academies have are freedom and autonomy. Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Education between 2010 and 2014, said that because of academisation schools have been "given the freedom and the power to take control of their own destiny" (Eyles et al 2017:108). Freedoms for academies involves not having to study the national curriculum and the ability to set their own term dates. However, autonomy in these areas goes alongside another neoliberal trope - accountability. An academy does not have to teach the national curriculum, but they are still held to performative measures such as pupil test results. It is clear from research that academies are not a panacea for school improvement (Gorard 2014, Andrew et al. 2017). Further nuance on the issue of accountability can be seen in the work of Ladd and Fiske who point out that while a school that becomes an academy has more freedom in some respects, e.g. from the local authority, many schools join other academies as part of a MAT. MATs typically hold certain powers centrally, so powers that had previously been the preserve of the headteacher in a school, are then held by an executive leader, such as a CEO, who has responsibilities across the MAT (2016).

There has been much reporting in the media of the way power is held within the academy school system, leading to criticism in the education and academic sectors. It has been reported that local school governors have less influence, (Sean Coughlin BBC, 2016a) that headteachers in each individual academy have less autonomy (TES, 2015) and that the role of parents in academy governance is being side-lined (Guardian, 2016). Similar concern is also expressed in academic writing, see for instance the work of Andrew Wilkins (2016a) and Jacqueline Baxter (2016). There

is a generally held assumption based on observation and anecdote that when schools join a MAT, powers which were held locally are taken away and held more centrally within the structure of the MAT. One example is from Leicestershire where the leadership of the Leicester Diocese Multi-Academy Trust planned to make the headteacher of Swinford Primary School redundant. Parents at the school felt that the decision was being made without their consultation (saveourhead.com, 2019). In this particular instance, the protests led to a change with Leicester Diocese Multi-Academy Trust agreeing to keep the headteacher in place and the resignation of the entire board of trustees under pressure from the Bishop of Leicester (BBC 2019a).

There is limited research into why schools choose to join MATs. While some (known as 'sponsored' academies), have no choice due to the failure to meet government set performance objectives, most choose to become 'converter' academies. In the period marked as Wave 3 by Rayner, converters represented almost 80% of the expansion of the academy sector (Eyles et al 2015). While research has looked at the types of school that academise, for example, those that are convertors are more likely to be in affluent areas (Bolton 2014, Eyles et al 2015) and there has also been research that suggests academies are not more effective than maintained schools (McNally 2015, Regan-Stansfield 2016, National Audit Office 2018), the rationale for joining a MAT is not well understood.

The power for making the decision about becoming an academy lies with the governors of a maintained schools, however the limited research that does exist suggests that the governors do not simply make such decisions in a vacuum. Rayner et al suggests from a case study of one governing body that there was an "enthusiasm" to convert but, when referring to the way some schools are made to become sponsored academies, there was a "determination not to be forced to convert" (2018:151). In other words, the possibility that that they may not be able to say no to becoming an academy at some point in future, encouraged governors to say yes now. Some thought has focused on the role of governors in opposing academisation (Wilkins 2016a) and case study research has looked at how governors ultimately failed to escape pressure to academise in the New Labour era (Elliott 2011), but there is a need for literature which reflects why governors choose to join MATs.

Neoliberalism

A body of academic writing has linked the academisation of the English school system with the paradigm of neoliberalism. Brighouse points out that government speeches and publications consistently contain neoliberal mantras such as 'choice', 'autonomy' and 'accountability' (2016:161-2). Arguments have been made for how government initiatives such as New Labour's 'Third Way' and David Cameron's 'Big Society' have helped neoliberal behaviours influence education in the academy system (Pickerdon et al 2015). Keddie links the behaviour of senior leaders in an academy chain with neoliberal behaviour traits such as self-responsibility and entrepreneurism (2015). Wilkins links the academy system with the neoliberal ideal of a minimal state with moves by successive governments, both New Labour (1997-2010) and Conservative (2010 onwards) to save the public from an over-bearing state. This is termed as the anti-producer capture rhetoric (2016b). Kulz considers MATs as a continuation of the generation-long move from a Keynesian welfare model to a neoliberal approach where economic reasoning replaces politics (2020).

Associated with the thinking of Milton Friedman, Freidrich Hayek and Robert Nozick, the term neoliberalism was first used by German scholars in the inter-war years. Before that Adam Smith's *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of the Nations* became the "originator of laissez faire economics" (Spencer in Smith, 2012a:xxv). Writing in the 18th century Smith argued outlined some of principles upon which neoliberalism would be founded: "If any branch of trade, or any division of labour, be advantageous to the public, the freer and more general the competition, it will always be the more so" (2012:458).

A significant catalyst was the Mont Pelerin Society – a group of like-minded individuals formed by Freidrich Hayek who were concerned about the spread of Marxist and Keynesian ideas. Instead they valued "market orientated economic systems" (Steger & Roy 2010:15). Hayek wrote that the "freedom of choice in a competitive society rests on the fact that, if one person refuses to satisfy our wishes, we can turn to another. But if we face a monopolist we are at his absolute mercy" (2006:96).

By the 1970s Latin American economists were using *neoliberalismo* as the word for their pro-market reforms and by the 1990s it was a term used throughout much of the world, even influencing thinking in Eastern Europe and China (Steger & Roy, 2010). Even when politics and economics evolved and new ideas emerged, for example the 'third way' of New Labour government in the late 1990s, the "hegemonic idea of neoliberalism…transcended all borders, infused policy discourse and influenced the development of welfare in all the major economies" (Farnsworth and Irving 2015:1).

Neoliberalism was rarely studied in academic circles until the 1980s, but by the early 2000s there were around five times as many academic articles about neoliberalism as there were for the related areas neoconservatism, market reform and monetarism combined (Boas & Gans-Morse 2009). Such an increase in use has led to the term's definition being contested. The role of the economic market is at the forefront of many definitions: Foucault states that neoliberalism is concerned with "how the overall exercise of political power can be modelled on the principles of a market economy" (2010:131). Ryan writes that neoliberalism "presents the market as the most efficient way of organising society" (2016:81). Referring to education, Wilkins describes how a focus on the market has reframed the relationship between parents and schools. It is now a relationship where parents are choosing providers as they might a supermarket or utility provider (2012).

Financial efficiency is another key tenet of most definitions of neoliberalism. Gunter describes the neoliberal position as being one where investing in public services is justified by the fact it helps to service the economy and protect capital accumulation. All activity is to be costed and compared against value-for-money measurements (2012). In a drive for greater efficiency the privatisation of the public sector is another theme of neoliberal discourse. Campbell explores the privatisation of the USA penal system and the associated trend of outsourcing. The numbers of prisoners in privately run jails jumped from 2,000 to 62,000 in the ten years from 1990 creating a system which on the one hand, "punishes the lower class, which populates the prisons; on the other hand, it profits the upper class, which owns the prisons, and it employs the middle class, which runs them" (2010:61). In the education sector, privatisation has often been associated with schools converting to academies. Miller argues that education is a public good, but with academies operating outside the remit of local authorities, it leaves parents or academies liable when things go wrong, rather

than the state. The choice that a market approach gives parents, means the state can argue parents did not exercise their choice with sufficient care and attention (2011).

Alongside neoliberalism's evolving definition, the term's connotations changed too; Boas & Gans-Morse trace an association to the Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet claiming this led to the term being used in an increasingly negative way (Boas & Gans-Morse, 2009). This was to the extent that in their literature review no author self-identified as neoliberal and 45% of articles took a negative stance as opposed to only 3% being positive (ibid.). Crouch gives an example of a common complaint of neoliberalism being that the strong get stronger, at the expense of the weak, citing inequality in America as an example, a country where neoliberalism is prevalent. Big business is so close to the elite it is able to manipulate the system in order to protect their own position (2011). An example from education would be English universities. The creation of the Russell Group of Universities is a way of protecting their status "by distinguishing themselves from the rest, so that they might pressurise the government to maintain and expand their privileges". Subsequently, the 1994 Group of universities was created in an attempt by those institutions not in the elite Russell Group to separate themselves from the newest universities who are often perceived as inferior (Canaan 2011:23).

There are some theories which closely relate to neoliberalism: There is some overlap with managerialism, but it's goal of organising society along the lines of a corporation (Klikauer, 2015) is more specific than the aforementioned definitions for neoliberalism. Managerialism's focus on outputs over inputs and performance indicators (Lynch, 2012) bleeds into the concept of performativity, another term closely allied to neoliberalism. Performativity means that individuals become "units of resource whose performance and productivity must constantly be audited so that it can be enhanced" (Shore & Wright, 1999:559). Performativity, a term first used by Jean-Francois Lyotard, is a focus on efficiency and effectiveness and a measuring of outputs compared to inputs (1984). This recording of data can start to become the focus (rather than the activity itself) and this can lead to a negative impact. League tables based on pupils' test results and inspection reports are increasingly the measurements by which schools and teachers are judged (Perryman, 2006). For Ball, performativity makes it possible for contemporary neoliberal governments to govern as it is a

controlling influence. It leads to individual practitioners to organising themselves as a response to targets, indicators and evaluations (2003). Performativity often has negative connotations, with Ball describing the "terror" it causes (2001:143) stating that "effectivity rather than honesty is most valued in a performative regime" (2003:226).

As is the case with any well used term, it is important to be mindful of common misconceptions about neoliberalism. Eagleton-Pierce warns against the "cliché" that neoliberalism seeks a reduction of the state. Instead he writes that it has never been "virulently anti-state in either theory or practice" (2016:176). While the Thatcher government of the 1980s may well have cut some aspects of the welfare state in an attempt to encourage people to make better choices in their lives, there was no significant reduction in the state. Thatcher herself claimed she was interested in discouraging state dependency and increasing self-reliance (1993). The impact of neoliberalism has not so much been a reduction in the role of the state, (although a case can be made for this) but a change in approach. The retrenchment of the welfare state is difficult politically; the cost for the politician "is concentrated (and often immediate) while the benefits are not" (Pierson 1996:241). Consequently, for all of the neoliberal credentials of the Thatcher government, four consecutive general election victories and a political system where power is concentrated by a first-past-the-post system, the British welfare state remained largely intact by the mid-1990s (Pierson 1996). The difficulty in applying neoliberal ideas to education policy is noted by Gunter who sees irony in the methods used by government to construct a neoliberal school system:

> "The irony is not in the gap between rhetoric and reality, but the inefficiency of the neoliberal project to implement market politics without recourse to the use of highly centrist powers that generate far greater costs and controls than those they seek to replace".
>
> (Gunter 2012:11)

Further nuance can be seen in a point made by many that it easy to overestimate the coherence of neoliberalism (Dean 2014, Davis 2016 and Wilkins 2018). The omnipotent usage of the term has led to a questioning of whether the definition of the term has become muddled. Clarke argues that the very concept of neoliberalism has been overused and consequently "suffers from promiscuity",

having been associated with too many other theoretical perspectives (2008:135). Neoliberalism's control is often considered imperfect too. The convenience of the concept can lead to oversimplified acceptance of neoliberalism; Wilkins argues that it is more often "asserted than it is critiqued in education research" (2018:4).

Another area contested in the literature on neoliberalism is the aforementioned association of academisation as privatisation. Although this claim has been made by academics (Heilbronn 2016, Exley 2017) and political organisations (UniteForEducation.org 2016, WeOwnIt.org.uk 2020) the case has not been made in any literature that the privatisation of many sectors in the 1980s has been replicated in education, although it is true that many features of the private world are now commonly used in education (Times Educational Supplement 2017).

There has been some criticism of the attempts to critique neoliberalism. Bourdieu, who himself was very much against neoliberalism (Grenfell, 2014), was frustrated with academic opposition in general. Perhaps referring to the aforementioned academic anti-neoliberal consensus - argues that criticism of neoliberalism has retreated into the "small world" of academia where it "enchants itself without ever being in a position to really threaten anyone about anything" (Bourdieu 2003:21). This may well be a result of there being little dissention in academic circles from the view that neoliberalism is bad; a review of literature has shown that the use of the term is common in articles and research which is critical of neoliberalism, but rare in the writing of those with more positive views (Boas & Gans-Morse, 2009).

Neoliberalism and Crisis

Neoliberalism's relationship with crises is worth exploring in some detail. Crises, by their nature, lead to difficulties, but they also facilitate change (Bermeo & Pontusson, 2012). Intuitively, we may well believe that a major problem such as a recession or a natural disaster may lead to people pause, reflect and possibly change their approach, but there is a body of literature which claims the opposite; that neoliberalism thrives and benefits from a crisis, even when the cause of the crisis can be linked to neoliberal policies. For instance, the worldwide 2008 financial crisis was a major event,

with far reaching consequences for much of the world. It has been argued that it indicated a "systemic crisis of neoliberal capitalism" and was due to neoliberal reforms such as the deregulation of markets and "unrestrained, cut-throat competition" between businesses (Kotz, 2009:305-6). Many speculated that this would be the death knell of neoliberalism (van Apeldoorn & Overbeek, 2012:1). Josef Stigltiz, a winner of the Nobel Prize for Economics, went as far as to predict that the 2008 crisis would lead to the "fall of Wall Street [and this] is to market fundamentalism what the fall of the Berlin Wall was to communism" (Gardels, 2008). Such predictions have not transpired. Instead many people have argued that neoliberalism has emerged unscathed and perhaps even stronger than before. For example, Katz refers to the response to the crisis being largely made up of further neoliberal policies, explaining that "the system itself periodically generates pressures to increase the value of capital and it creates antibodies to sterilize the regulations in force. This phenomenon…will return anew when capitalism needs to restore the rate of profit" (2009:4). Crouch outlines the way in which neoliberal thinking criticises aspects of public policy and then provides an alternative approach, or solution to the 'problem'. For example, the public sector is judged by neoliberal standards as being unresponsive to the market. Once identified as a problem, a solution is sought. In this case reform of the public sector, perhaps privatisation. Figure 2.2 outlines areas in which the public sector is perceived to have failed and the subsequent neoliberal response.

Public Sector Failure	Marketisation response
A. Unresponsive to consumers; dominated by producer interests; centralised and remote	(i) Privatisation, with regulation where competition remains imperfect (ii) Market-making within public service, with direct consumer choice guided by performance data (iii) Private providers and sub-contractors compete with public ones, but within the publicly funded system
B. Unwanted services; inadequate cost effectiveness; high taxes	(iv) Internal markets
C. Public service out of touch with business	(v) Adoption of business criteria in government practice (vi) Encouragement of intensive interaction with, and learning from, private sector

Figure 2.2 Neoliberal responses to perceived failure in the public sector (Crouch 2011:77)

Aspects of Crouch's idea of neoliberal norms leading to dissatisfaction with aspects of the state's work, are evident in changes to the education system. For example, while school inspectors have existed long before neoliberalism, from the late 1980's their role morphed into one more focused on holding schools to account, (in tune with the neoliberal trait of performativity), rather than their previous role of advising schools. The 1988 Education Reform Act made provision for an inspectorate to be more independent of the education system with lay inspectors and the publication of reports providing increased accountability (Abbott et al. 2013). John Major's Citizen's Charter was an attempt to allay concerns over standards in the public sector (Timmins, 2001). Specifically, in education this led to the creation of league tables for schools (ibid.). Such an extreme accountability measure was only possible because there was sufficient concern for standards – the 'solution' needed to solve a problem.

Klein argues that neoliberal policies have risen to prominence in some countries through capitalising on disasters, citing examples such as the flooding of New Orleans in 2005 or the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The devastating flooding of New Orleans after hurricane Katrina struck was seen as an opportunity by some, (including the aforementioned Milton Friedman) to introduce a voucher system for public education – something which promotes the neoliberal idea of consumer choice. In the wake of the tragedy, Charter Schools, which share some traits with academies in England, became the dominant force in the New Orleans education system (2007). In the wake of 9/11 there was a major programme of outsourcing of security and military functions allowing private firms to take huge amounts of money from the government, all in the name of "The War on Terror" (ibid.). A huge industry in lobby firms took off. In 2001 there were two such organisations helping companies win government contracts. In 2006 there was 543 (ibid.). While neoliberalism itself cannot be blamed for hurricanes or extreme terrorist attacks, Klein argues that neoliberal policies have had an influence. For example, the USA Department for Transport accused airlines of putting profits before safety. Security at airports had become the responsibility of the airlines, i.e. companies, rather than the state (in line with the neoliberal trait of outsourcing). Their desire to keep costs down meant that provision was less than it had been before and this had been a contributing factor to the success of the terrorist attacks (ibid.).

While there can be little doubting that an event such as a major terrorist attack or natural disaster constitutes something at least akin to a crisis, some events need some help in reaching a level of severity sufficient to cause concern and therefore establish a need for change. Here, the way the media reports events can have a significant impact. Golding charts how the speeches of politicians combined with certain media coverage created an impression of crisis in the welfare state in respect of benefit fraud. Throughout the 1990s news stories blurred "the lines between welfare dependency and criminality". Such stories made the public more receptive to speeches by government ministers from successive governments (both Conservative and Labour) where plans to take tough stances against welfare cheats were outlined (1999). Facts such as the UK being 9th out of 11 nations for welfare protection in 1995-6 struggled to get media airtime among more salacious stories of "scroungers" such as *The Daily Mirror's* account of Paul Booth, who had eleven children and two partners living under the same roof and *The Sun's* invitation to its readers to nominate people they know for its "Britain's Biggest Scrounger" award (1999:142). With a narrative of waste and perhaps crisis in the welfare state established, cuts were easier to establish (1999).

An example in education of moral outrage being generated to create the idea of there being a crisis and therefore establish the need for change, comes from the publication of *The Black Papers*. These were a series of articles on British education, published from 1969 to 1977 which "reflected the disturbance, and indeed rage, of the authors at new trends in education that characterised the 1960s", such as the increase in comprehensive education and the decline in the use of examinations in universities (Simon 1999:400). In one chapter, *The Mystique of Modern Maths*, Froome bemoaned changes introduced which called the practice of drilling children with number facts outdated. Froome argued that children were possibly "handicapped" by such changes and criticised the change in name from arithmetic to mathematics (in Cox and Dyson (eds) 1969:104-5). The publication of the first two Black Papers caused controversy and the controversy worked: The Black Paper proposals became the "root of mainstream Labour and Tory policy" (The Guardian, 2008).

Theoretical Perspectives

Michel Foucault is one of the most influential thinkers of the latter half of the twentieth century (Gutting, 2005). His work would often return to the theme of how power is used in society. Famously obtuse in his writing, comprehending Foucault has been described as a struggle (Ball 2013) and disconcerting (Taylor, 1986). Foucault often referred to the history or 'genealogy' of concepts, as demonstrated by titles to many of his books (for example *The History of Madness* and *The History of Sexuality*).

Foucault offers an explanation of how government can control the actions of society through his governmentality theory. Foucault does not subscribe to a top down idea of power, instead all participants are involved in reproducing the knowledge which is integral to power through their everyday actions (Gutter, 2005). Foucault uses historical comparison to make his point; a contemporary account of a barbaric 18th century execution is used as an example of how control can be exercised through the threat of violence, before being contrasted with more recent and nuanced methods of control, which, while lacking blatant brutality, are arguably as penetrating and insidious as previous versions (Taylor, 1986).

Foucault had an interesting relationship with neoliberalism. He describes the state as becoming the "site of minimal provision and last resort" (2010:149). For him neoliberalism is concerned with "how the overall exercise of political power can be modelled on the principles of a market economy" (2010:131). Such an approach is "fragile, and therefore needs the active support of government – it is not a state of nature" (2010:131). Ball unpicks the paradox of neoliberalism "not governing too much" - that is neoliberalism can seem as being against the state, but it requires "constant reciprocity" with it (2013:129). As Foucault says: "Each society has its regime of truth, its general politics of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true" (Gordon, 1980:207). Consequently, certain ideas and approaches are accepted and not questioned. This system of 'governmentality' is closely wedded to the neoliberal ontology. Deviation from the norm is difficult; normalisation has become "one of the great instruments of power" (Foucault, 1979:184). For Foucault neoliberalism exercises power in subtle ways. Governmentality theory provides an alternative to the more simplistic and dualistic concept of governing being about

freedom/constraint or consensus/violence. Foucault's governmentality theory provides a continuum ranging from political government to self-regulation. Governmentality therefore allows for a more complex analysis of neoliberal forms of government (Dean, 1999).

Foucault's notion of discourse is an important part of his understanding of how people are normalised by the regime of truth. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault explains that discourse is entwined with the larger systems of thought within a particular point in history. It is discourse which makes certain things thinkable and say-able and informs the various positions all people (or subjects) take:

> "Discourse is not the majestically unfolding manifestation of a thinking, knowing, speaking subject, but, on the contrary, a totality, in which the dispersion of the subject and his discontinuity with himself may be determined" (2002:62).

Foucault therefore believes that by understanding discourse we can understand how power is exercised and ask questions about the institutional production of political power. Ball believes that much of modern scholarly work citing Foucault fails to have the required political focus that Foucault's original writings calls for (2013). A similar criticism is made of the way people have taken Foucault's concept of governmentality; it is frequently described in the name of Foucault, whereas in reality much of this is the work of secondary commentators who have built on the original work of Foucault "in ways that belie its original formulation", and indeed, generate analyses which "are decidedly 'un-Foucauldian'" (Rutherford, 2007:292).

The focus on discourse is problematic for researchers who wish to apply governmentality in a policy-centric setting. By disregarding complex and "messy" empirical activities there is "a fundamental inability to account for why the governable subject, constituted through discourse, fails to turn up in practice" (McKee, 2009:12). It has been argued that this has created an image of the "social as a machine" that is able to reform everything it comes into contact with (Hunter, 2003) and consequently undermines the role of individual agency.

McKee (2009) outlines various ways in which Foucault's theory of governmentality can be criticised: A lack of focus on social difference and how certain groups, e.g. women and those from ethnic minorities who tend not to have equal amount of power as some other groups. In addition, the focus on the plurality of government is at the expense of a more detailed understanding of how governments retain considerable power and influence. McKee believes that Foucault does not adequately capture the role of resistance and how this can thwart government ambitions. This is a criticism relevant to my research, as there has been, as outlined earlier in the literature review, some resistance to academisation.

McKee advocates a 'realist governmentality' approach as an improvement on Foucault's governmentality (ibid.). McKee takes the work – originally in the field of criminology – of Kevin Stenson which challenges dominant versions of 'discursive' governmentality theory "political relations" and the "struggle for the control of the population" (Stenson, 2005:272). Stenson argues that such "struggle" is most evident locally; referring to his field he gives the example of local gangs challenging the ability of local law enforcement teams to enact national policy (2005). This correlates well with what has been seen in the academisation of the English school's system, where national policy has relied on local actors (governors) to make decisions about schools becoming an academy. Stenson's realist governmentality allows a focus on what is the inevitable gap between what is attempted and what is accomplished (McKee, 2009).

Rayner suggests that a Foucauldian analysis can struggle in complex processes where unanticipated events can derail the expected influence of governmentality (2017). Rayner looked at the academisation of recent years and its impact on the education system. Actors in his case study of a secondary school were convinced of the need for their school to become an academy, not because there was direct instruction from the government, but because they were convinced academisation was inevitable and therefore they should accept the change (ibid.). Despite this, the school didn't become an academy despite early indications suggesting it was highly likely. Rayner concludes that policy outcomes do not always achieve what was intended by policy makers. McKee sees the need for a modified version of Foucault's theory. In this more nuanced theory, "realist" governmentality allows for scenarios where government ambitions are not always realised (2009).

While some question governmentality in the context of when things "go wrong" i.e. the intended "convenient end" not being reached, it is not yet clear from existing research to what extent such resistance to policy counters governmentality and Foucault's concept of the omnipotent regime of truth. This should be borne in mind alongside the aforementioned questioning of neoliberalism's coherence and stability.

The pervasiveness of Foucault's 'regime of truth' can be seen in the difficulties in theoretically conceptualising governance. Wilkins and Olmedo state that governance lacks a clear meaning in education, despite being often "reduced to something procedural and programmatic" (2018:3). Key texts that instruct how school governing boards should act (and which feature in my research) are primarily published by the government or its agencies, but contain a narrow view of governance. For Lemke, "governance involves a shift in the analytical and theoretical focus from institutions to processes" as well as "the eclipse or erosion of state sovereignty" (2007:13). This reconfiguration of state power, fits with a state-centric theory of governance, as described by Pierre & Peters, whose work describes how governments use governance to retain and even strengthen their power, despite the shifting of state authority to numerous organisations and bodies (2019). Peck sees neoliberalism as continually failing and consequently a market orientated approach to governance is required (2010:xiii). In education, governance aims to "superficially stabilise elements of complexity" (Wilkins & Olmedo (2018:9). For Rose, governance has become a "technology of mistrust" (1999:154). Governance can therefore be seen as a controlling influence over the education system and I will consequently adopt a governmentality theoretical perspective of governance throughout my research.

This is not to exclude the existence of other perspectives which can displace the neoliberal orthodoxy; there are a range of different ways of viewing governance. Furthermore, Wilkins cautions against the temptation for researchers to avoid the messiness of the world by moulding it to a particular viewpoint (Wilkins, 2021). It is therefore important to acknowledge different ways of conceptually framing governance. Spina et al. describe an Australian case study where school leaders placed an ethical approach above neoliberal and performative influences (2019). In the study, values such as collaboration and collegiality are prioritised ahead of performative

viewpoints. Bevir outlines another approach where democratic conceptualisation of governance which focuses on participatory and deliberative processes as an alternative to state and corporate power (2008). Such an approach where participatory and democratic approaches are valued jars with the MAT system; as I will outline in the next section, there are many criticisms of the academy system and the way democracy has been sidelined. As outlined in chapter one when detailing my positionality, my own views do not always sit easily alongside current approaches to education. For example, in my current professional role I am exploring ways of reinstating local accountability in the governance structure of the MAT I work for (Dewes, 2021). My conceptualisation of governance is rooted in the reality of the wider education system, rather than my personal beliefs or ideals.

As well as acknowledging the limitation in focusing on just one perspective of governance, it is important to note that bedrock of my conceptualisation of governance, neoliberalism, is itself contested and evolving. The possibility of a form of 'post-neoliberalism' has been mooted in recent years (Peck et al, 2010). One possible source of evidence for this is the restoring of powers to individual nation state which had been 'stolen' by technocratic, multilateral and financial authorities (Davis & Gane, 2021). Brexit in the UK and President Trump's tenure in the USA are often cited as example of a change in neoliberalism. For example, Kiely charts the link between Conservative popularism in the USA and possible changes in neoliberalism (2020). This leaves the relationship between "neoliberalism and our current epoch as at least an open question" (Davis & Gane, 2021:2). Consequently, I acknowledge the potential impact on the governmentality theoretical perspective of governance used in my research.

Tensions in a neoliberal school system

In this section I build on observations made in the first chapter and review them in the light of the literature on neoliberalism and crisis. Here I refer to tensions rather than crises, so as to not use a pejorative term that may be problematic when conducting research.

There are numerous examples of neoliberalism in the current education system. Writing as an education professional, there are some examples where neoliberal practices can be challenging to

enact and create the tensions referred to in the introductory chapter. Below I go into more depth about these tensions. I am not describing these areas as crises in the context of the theory of neoliberal crises leading to further neoliberalism, however I acknowledge that some in the education sector may think of them as crises or there is the potential for them to develop into crises. There is also the influence of neoliberalism behind each of them. Consequently, I will refer to them as neoliberal tensions.

Tension 1: Neoliberal influences on school governance

School governance plays an important role in the education system. Governors are said to be the largest group of volunteers in the country, contributing in excess of an estimated £1 billion to the education system (James et al. 2014). The Department for Education states that governing boards have three core functions: Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction; holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, including the effective and efficient performance management of staff; and overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent (2019b).

There have been changes to school governance in recent times linked to the prevailing political wind of neoliberalism. In the neoliberal climate approaches to school governance have changed; a managerial discourse has replaced alternative understandings such as a democratic discourse (Young, 2015). A democratic approach included carefully planned stakeholder representation, where people who were considered vital to the survival and success of the school were represented (Connolly, 2017). Stakeholder governance has its origins in the idea that there are 'groups of people without whose support the organisation would cease to exist' (Lozano, 2005:60). Freeman defines a stakeholder as "any individual or group who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives" (1984:46). Connolly explains that the crux of the stakeholder approach is that schools should be "strategically led by individuals who are representative of and from the groups that have an interest in them" (2017:5).

There is considerable criticism of the shift from governors being recruited because of stakeholder representation to the focus being on professional skills. The DfE's *Governor Competency Framework*

sets out what is professional skills are needed. For example, everyone on the board should have "a basic understanding of financial management" so that they can be "rigorous in their questioning to understand whether enough is being done to drive financial efficiency" (2017:16-17). Another example of what skills are valued is that at least one person on the board should have expertise in human resources (2017:19). For Rose, this is a trend which is not just about school governance – it is a more general trend towards valuing managerial expertise, from educational professionalism to managerial professionalism and from trusting people to accountability by audit (2015). Young writes that this has led to the marginalisation of non-managerial voices (2015). Young plots recent developments in this area, explaining the move towards valuing governors with certain skills (ibid.). In March 2015, the Department for Education announced £1 million to help schools across England recruit highly skilled governors. However, the statutory guidance on the skills governing bodies need leaves the definition of skills very "open and ambiguous" (Young 2015:2). Regulations taking effect from September 2015 stipulated that when recruiting governors, governing bodies need to focus on finding people with the necessary skills. Further, it suggests that governing bodies conduct a review of their effectiveness, membership and structure and make changes to ensure it is not just fit for purpose, but that it is "dynamic and highly professional in its approach" (Connolly 2017:14).

A case has been made for the importance of a skillset approach. The National Association of Headteachers have said that some governing bodies may not have the necessary skills and knowledge to assess fairly the recommendations of the head and therefore either reject outright any change to the status quo or force through inappropriate change (Young, 2015). For some, governors having a lack of knowledge has been shown to be a barrier (Young, 1995). Some literature suggests that the headteacher can be the dominant figure in determining the school's direction and vision and some governing bodies can play a comparatively minor role. This suggests that some bodies, constructed on the stakeholder model, may struggle to fulfil their responsibilities, including holding the headteacher to account (Connolly et al. 2017).

Young points out the "slippery, complex and contentious" nature of professional skills in governance. In her research, the view of governors is that it is hazardous to make education the

province of professionals only (2015:3). The business approach to governance meant that in some governing meetings it was easy to forget that the meetings were about schools (2015). Connolly et al. questions whether governors recruited for skills are able to understand the local context of schools, particularly in the event of significant local events. Such events will typically reflect the concerns of stakeholders. There is evidence of the ability of governing bodies to manage such periods, and in doing so demonstrate considerable resilience, which indicates that there is huge value in the stakeholder approach (2017). Wilkins claims that the skillset approach to governor recruitment "undermines democracy" (2016a:2). Traditionally, democracy played an important role in school governance. Deem et al. (writing in the 1990s) compares democracy in school governance to various traditional models of participatory governance, e.g. Rousseau, Mill and Marx (1995). Baxter explains that we have now seen the erosion of the democratic structures of school governance that have been in place since the late 1960s (2016).

There are some more nuanced writings on the subject of democracy and school governance: Schotak has a pragmatic idea of the role of democracy in education governance, suggesting that "people are too busy with their lives to be able to be involved in politics, they need experts to do the decision making for them". What is more, people can't be asked to vote on everything, there are simply too many decisions needed. Consequently, it best to leave it to an "elite" (2016:3). Connolly et al. point out that although parents and staff are elected to governing bodies, there "is no formal mechanism of accountability" once they are elected (2017:12). As of 2017 elected parents or staff governors can be removed by the rest of the governing body, with those who elected them having no recourse (NGA, 2017). Shatkin and Gershberg make the case for parents having a positive impact on governance when they are given a meaningful role and training is provided (2007). Interestingly, they advocate training organisations which are independent of government or a strong political viewpoint. Ng describes different phases of parental involvement in governance. Resistance from within education has had to be overcome - parent governors were described as "unwelcome guests" in the first phase – if parents are to have a meaningful role that goes beyond rhetoric (2013:670).

While Wilkins' work is often a passionate defence of the importance of democracy in school governance, he does acknowledge some of the challenges to such an approach. For example,

recruiting local councillors, once the bedrock of democracy in governing boards, to serve as governors is difficult (2016a). A decline in the role of democracy in school governance has been met with an increase in accountability measures. Young summarises the change as "political accountability [being] replaced by market accountability" (2015:13). Ball et al. (1997) define two types of market accountability; accountability through service provision and accountability through effective financial management. Although there has perhaps been an historic view that governors have not been answerable for their work and that "that for the most part, school governing bodies can operate without much public attention" (James et al. 2010:3), there is growing recognition of the burden accountability measures place on governors. Writing about regulations for governors to be named on each school website and the impact a highly accountable school system may have on individual governors, Connolly et al. notes "this enhanced scrutiny is facilitated by the publication of inspection reports and the interest of local and sometimes national media in these. Details of a school's governing board members are typically available on the school's website and governors in the future may find themselves increasingly held to account" (2017:16). For Baxter, accountability can be overwhelming and give rise to "multiple accountability disorder" (2016:1).

Writing in the 1920s, Walter Lippmann (1993) wrote that people are too busy with their lives to be closely involved in decision making. Consequently, they need experts to do the decision making for them. An example of a neoliberal democratic process in education is the election of Headteacher Boards who advise Regional School Commissioners (RSC). These are relatively new local bodies, introduced to oversee the academy sector. Being independent of LA influence, they have looser democratic controls. Introduced in 2014, there are eight RSCs who are appointed as civil servants and carry out various functions on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education. They are overseen by a National Schools Commissioner. They approve the conversion of maintained schools into academies and intervene where academies are said to be underperforming. There is a veneer of democratic representation in the work of RSCs; each RSC is supported by a Headteacher Board mostly made up of headteachers who are voted for by other headteachers. This however, is a limited form of democracy where only the elite, i.e. headteachers in the academy sector, have a voice.

On a similar theme, Wilkins has written that if a form of democracy does still exist in the English education system, "it is one reserved for the skilled and committed" (2016a:147). It has been argued that the individualism that characterises modern society has led to less democracy (Klikauer, 2013). For Arthur (2015), the decline in the role of local authorities has created confusion in the education system. Historically, local authorities have helped to provide agreed collective public and civil values but now there is a vacuum.

Perhaps linked to the expectations being placed on governors due to a highly accountable system, there are concerns over governors' workload. It has been established for some time that governing entails a considerable time commitment (James et al. 2014). Nearly a third of governors say their work is not manageable within the recommended limit of 20 days per year (Holland, 2017). Furthermore, there is some evidence that the workload of those who govern in the academy sector have an even greater workload (Pain, 2017). Research has shown that those who govern as chairs of MAT boards are spending on average thirty hours a month or fifty days a year (Fellows, 2019:10). The workload is such that nearly a third of chairs have considered resigning (Fellows, 2019:20).

The time commitment expected of governors provides one challenge when it comes to recruiting volunteers. This sits alongside the aforementioned expectations in terms of governors' professional skills. It is perhaps no surprise then that it sometimes difficult for schools to recruit the necessary number of governors – almost one third of governing boards surveyed in a large national study had at least one vacancy (Holland, 2017). With four in five governors being managers, directors or senior professionals (or they were, before they retired) (ibid.) it means that most governors are taken from a narrow sector of society. This also means that schools in disadvantaged communities have a particular challenge recruiting the governors they need, as there are fewer professionals within their vicinity (James et al. 2014).

Seemingly aware of the pressures on governors, the DfE have made the case for the centralisation of power under the MAT governance system as being a solution to the problem:

> "It [governance in MATs] enables more schools and pupils to benefit from the strategic leadership of the most talented non-executive and executive leaders. Conversely, people who transition from sitting on the board of a standalone school to operating under the leadership of say a MAT board, may be relieved to have the burden of ultimate accountability and the responsibility for financial and other corporate functions held centrally, leaving them freer to focus on the needs of their school and the progress and attainment of its pupils. (DfE, 2017:41)

There are a number of texts which instruct governors on how they should govern. The most prominent are the Department for Education's Governance Handbook (DfE, 2020) and Governor Competency Framework (DfE, 2017). In addition, schools are highly accountable to the criteria set out in the OFSTED Inspection Handbook (OFSTED 2019). Finally, for schools in the academy sector, there is the Academies Financial Handbook (Education and Skills Funding Agency, 2020). All of these documents are either written by the Department for Education or their agencies. I will return to their influence later in my thesis.

Tension 2: Financial constraints (post 2008 financial crisis)

In the mid-to-late 2000s a crisis in the United States subprime mortgage market emerged which soon had an effect across the global economy. This was due the fact that financial institutions in all major countries proved unable to control their direct and indirect exposure to the high-risk lending that drove global finance from the early 1990s onwards. In the first quarter of 2009, twenty-five of the twenty-seven-member states of the European Union experienced negative GDP growth (Bermeo & Pontusson 2012). Consequently, there was a wide range of cuts to public spending. This was deemed necessary to recoup the debts incurred by states in order to finance banking bailouts and fiscal stimulus packages needed as result of the recession (MacLeavy, 2011). The financial crisis demonstrated that a market-based economy is not infallible, but it was the significant cuts in public spending rather than a change in economic approach, which was the response (Farnworth & Irving, 2015).

Education spending in England experienced significant cuts and balancing school budgets became harder. DfE data showed that in the academic year 2017/18, 30% of maintained secondary schools had in-year deficits, and the size of these deficits was on average £484,000 (Kreston, 2019). Although this has to be set alongside what had been a considerable increase in the previous decade: Data collected by Institute for Fiscal Studies shows a substantial growth in education spending in the 2000s, with real school spending per pupil in 2019–20 expected to be more than 50% higher than in 2000–01 (Bellefield & Sibielta, 2016).

There has been numerous anecdotal examples of the impact of these cuts on schools. Siobhan Lowe, the head of Tolworth Girls' School in south London, said that her school's curriculum had been reduced and pastoral care been badly affected. More than this she said "I've personally cleaned the school, washed the toilets, as a headteacher. My girls look at me and feel so sorry for me they actually pick up the Hoover and do it with me. I've cleaned doors, I've served in the school canteen" (The Times, 2019). Despite this the government has attempted a counter narrative, with Lord Agnew promising he could find waste in any school and betting a bottle of champagne to any headteacher who proves him wrong (SchoolsWeek, 2018c).

An important part of the nuance around school funding in England is regional variation. Funding is typically greater in urban disadvantaged areas compared to more affluent rural 'shire' counties. In 2013-14 there was 30% difference between the funding of schools in the most disadvantaged quintile of secondary schools and those in the least disadvantaged quintile (Bellefield & Sibielta, 2016). Following consultations, the government announced that a National Funding Formula would be introduced in 2018-19, with the intention that all 152 local authority specific funding formulae be replaced with one single national funding formula, although the pressure group f40 claimed that significant regional variation remained (2019).

A significant development in school funding is Integrated Curriculum Financial Planning (ICFP) (also known as Curriculum Led Financial Planning and Strategic Resource Management.) There is a clear link between austerity and ICFP. The former increases the need to look for efficiencies and the latter offers a tool by which to find them (PKF-FrancisClark, 2018). Outwood Grange Academies

Trust pioneered the approach and Sir Michael Wilkins, former principal of Outwood Grange Academy (the school from which the trust evolved) says of austerity "tough times bring it [decisions around finance] into focus" (DfE, 2016).

ICFP makes schools or MATs look at the "structuring, planning and timetabling of the workforce in a way that efficiently covers the curriculum" with the aim "of having reasonable class sizes, driving up performance and creating a [budgetary] surplus" (DfE, 2016a). More specifically ratios and metrics are created and then compared to national benchmarks. Three common ratios are:

1. Cost per lesson (broadly calculated as total teaching staff cost divided by number of teaching periods);
2. Teacher contact ratio (broadly calculated as the average number of teaching periods divided by the total number of periods); and
3. Curriculum headroom/bonus (essentially a positive or negative statistic based on class size as a % of average class size)

(PKF-FrancisClark, 2018)

It has been claimed that ICFP has been effective in helping to identify where a school has a curriculum which is to too broad to be financially efficient, class sizes are "sub-optimal", staff structure is expensive or staff more generally are inefficiently deployed (Kreston, 2019:8).

The government has been encouraging schools to adopt ICFP, but has stopped short of compelling through legislation. Instead there are a wide range of attractive government initiatives which offer funding or training, but have the condition that ICFP approaches are used. MATs which have applied through the MAT Development Improvement Fund found that bids - which were often £100,000 or more - were only successful if they agreed to a government advisor working with them to review their finances in line with the ICFP approach (TES, 2018). National Leaders of Education such as myself are asked to work with schools requiring support. The trigger for such support is usually a poor OFSTED report or low pupil outcomes, yet schools accepting support are expected to review their finances, again in line with the ICFP approach, regardless of whether there have been any financial difficulties (DfE, 2019c). Finally, aspiring headteachers studying for the National Professional Qualification for Headship must carry out a Strategic Resources Management review

of a school as part of the training (DfE, 2019e). The reach of these initiatives – and therefore ICFP - is considerable; 1,657 school were eligible for financial review via the work of NLEs alone in the 2018-19 academic year (DfE, 2019d). Stevenson argues that school leaders such as NLEs have been used by the government to enact its agenda and in doing so have become the "front line of the frontier of control" and diminished the role of those leading locally such as headteachers and governors (2018:220).

- Tension 3: The decline in the role of local authorities

Academies are state-funded and independent of local authorities (LA). Maintained schools have varying degrees of local authority involvement and are directly funded by them, whereas academies are funded directly by the government (Roberts & Danechi, 2019). In a maintained school the land and buildings are owned by the LA, who are also the employer of staff. There are common policies across such schools, such as admissions and staff pay. Academies are granted considerable freedom in such areas (Eyles et al. 2017). Academisation therefore leads to a decline in the role of the local authority (Simkins et al. 2014).

The expansion of the academy system has meant that gradually more and more schools have moved away from local authority control. As of October 2018, there were 8,166,038 pupils studying in state-funded schools in England. Of these, 4,091,312 pupils were being educated in an academy, meaning 50.1% of pupils studying in state-funded schools in England were in an academy (DfE, 2018). Some have suggested that there has been a snowball effect; as more schools have left LA control, others have seen there to be less merit in staying as a LA maintained school. Rayner looked at the views of those who worked in a school which was considering academy status. One headteacher remarked:

> "I can think of only two, possibly three (local) schools that are not academies now, so we're basically working in a Local Authority where academy chains have kind of replaced or been a substitute for what the LA used to do … I would still prefer to work in a local-

> authority school. However, I think 'when in Rome …' and you're in a siege mentality, which I think is where education is at the moment, I think to protect yourself you might have to go against some of your own political feelings and motivations."
>
> (2017:100)

Another staff member valued the independence that they thought academisation might bring, suggesting that as an academy they could make better spending decisions (ibid.). The government has made much of the freedoms on offer to schools which become academies with Minister for Schools Nick Gibb stating that "by empowering teachers and headteachers and promoting an atmosphere of innovation and evidence, power is wrestled from the old authorities. Ideas are weighed and, if they are found wanting, they can be discarded" (DfE, 2017c). However, others have pointed out that the independence comes at a price; more specifically there is an expectation of accountability, or as Wilkins puts it, "market discipline and responsibility" (2018:6). The political accountability of an LA is replaced by market accountability (Young, 2015).

The international financial crash of 2008 influenced spending decisions relating to local authorities. From 2010 an age of austerity was called by successive governments with cuts of around 25 percent of local government budgets called for (Lowndes & Pratchett, 2012). In 2017 the Department withdrew funding that was previously paid to local authorities for school support services (NAO, 2018) thus hollowing out the school support function of LAs further.

The decline in the role of local authorities plays a significant part in the aforementioned controversy surrounding democracy in school/academy governance. With governors increasingly being selected by virtue of their skills, rather than their ability to represent a particular group of stakeholders, there is a stark contrast to the hay day of local governance, where all schools had LA governors, something which academies do not have. LA governors were frequently elected councillors, providing a clear democratic link beyond the election of parent and staff governors. In some parts of the country there was a such a close link between local election results and the make-up of LA governors on governing bodies that the percentage of LA governors from each political party reflected the results of local elections (Gann, 2016).

For Arthur the decline in the role of local authorities has created confusion in the education system. Historically, local authorities have helped to provide "agreed collective public and civil values" (2015:311). Governors have filled the void left by local authorities with the academy system allowing them more power than they had before (ibid.). Arthur cites the "Trojan Horse affair" as an example of this. In 2014 *The Sunday Times* published a story about Islamic fundamentalists plotting to take over schools in Birmingham. The paper alleged that certain schools' governing bodies were implementing policies such as the prioritising the teaching of Islamic Studies and non-Muslim staff being side-lined (The Sunday Times, 2014). Baxter claimed some of the reporting by *The Sunday Times* and other sections of the media was sensationalist. She links the way the story was reported by various media outlets with past reporting of other stories which had led to moral panic (2016). The schools at the centre of the story were inspected by OFSTED, with five schools being given the lowest inspection outcome, special measures. The reports noted the lack of monitoring by the local authority (Arthur, 2015). Other investigations perhaps contained more nuance around the issue. Kershaw, recognising the vacuum within which school governors were operating, due to the demise of the Birmingham local authority noted that it was still council policy that if governors were overstepping the mark and Birmingham City Council were aware of the issue then support and intervention would happen. However, the capacity for the council to do so had been greatly reduced. The team which was there to provide support had been reduced to eight from 120 people just four years before (2014). Arthur questions whether the Trojan Horse affair was not simply an extreme ideological plot, but more the inevitable side-effects of the local authority's role being reduced (2015).

The coronavirus pandemic placed a great strain on the education system. In March 2020, schools closed to all pupils other than those considered vulnerable and those whose parents were worked in key areas such as healthcare. Overnight the main role of schools was transformed into one of childcare to enable 'keyworkers' to continue to attend work. The Prime Minister explained that "by looking after the children of key workers, [schools] will be a critical part of our fightback against coronavirus" (Department for Education, 2020). LAs were given a crucial role in organising

provision (Dewes, 2020), but this expectation was challenging given the aforementioned decline in the role of LAs.

My research questions

The literature reviewed shows the influence of neoliberalism on the education system. Neoliberal traits are prominent throughout the English education system and these can be traced to particular tensions being felt within education. At this point, it is worth revisiting my research questions and considering them in the light of the literature reviewed. The questions are:

- What are the neoliberal tensions in the academisation of schools?

- What are the factors influencing the decisions of individual schools when considering joining a MAT?

My research needs to be conducted because even though there is an established theory of neoliberalism perpetuating itself through responses to the crises it causes, it has not been tested in an English educational context. Furthermore, although Foucault's notion of governmentality has been used in relation to the academisation of the English school system, there is widespread opposition to the academisation. Further research is needed to illuminate the intersection of protest (against academisation) and pragmatism (where people have been convinced of the need for their school to become an academy because the neoliberal tensions are so keenly felt.)

Chapter 3: Methodology and Ethics

In this chapter I will explain the approach I have taken with my research and the ethical considerations I made. I begin by discussing the epistemological and ontological stances I have taken, before describing my methodological approach alongside the methods used in my data collection, the latter including discourse analysis and realist governmentality. I also account for the choices made in deciding my research sample, before detailing the ethics of my research.

Epistemology

My research is underpinned by a largely interpretivist approach to epistemology. This approach sees knowledge as something gradually developed by the researcher and those being researched with "accounts and observations leading to indirect explanations of phenomena" (Waring, 2012:16). The interpretivist view is that reality can be seen in multiple ways (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). The knowledge acquired in this discipline is constructed socially rather than categorically defined (Carson et al. 2001). In contrast, positivism depends on quantifiable observations that behave in a "regular manner" (Collins 2010:38). Such a view does not seem appropriate for my research. My literature review outlined the work of several researchers where academisation in various settings was not seen as predictable, despite government policies encouraging such a development. For example, Rayner concludes that policy outcomes do not always develop in the way policy makers intended them to (2017). McKee sees the need for a modified version of Foucault's governmentality theory as Foucault's "convenient end" is not always reached (2009:482).

What is more, the interpretivist approach acknowledges that the researcher is part of the research. As they are interpreting the data they can never be fully objective and removed from the research. This aligns with my constructivist approach and position as someone who does the same roles as those I am researching and contrasts with positivism where the researcher is expected to be independent from the study (Dudovskiy, 2018). I do not believe that it is possible to collect data and interpret it dispassionately; as someone working and governing in the area of interest, I would not have been able to divorce my analysis from my own experiences of the roles held and the scenarios lived through by my research subjects. As previously stated, it is my own experiences

which were the initial catalyst to my research. They, alongside my literature review, have left me with a view on what I have experienced and observed and my research questions are influenced by this deductive approach. Conversely, deductive reasoning is sometimes seen as more of a positivist, than interpretivist approach (Crowther & Lancaster, 2008). However, due to my extensive exposure to the field of research, I think a deductive approach was appropriate; it was inevitable that I had my own theories based on my extensive observations.

Within the interpretivist approach, phenomenology provides a more specific approach to knowledge, where it is believed that what "is directly perceived and felt is considered more reliable than explanations or interpretations in communication" (Littlejohn & Foss 2009). As already stated, the starting point of my research is what I have perceived and felt myself and this was the first step towards developing my research questions. My research methodology has been chosen in order to give me the best chance of uncovering how my research subjects "perceive and feel" things themselves.

Ontology

I adopted a largely constructivist approach to my research. Cohen et al. describe the constructivist research as being aimed at understanding the "world of human experiences" and the researcher and participants "co-constructing" meaning (1994:36). This is based on the belief that the knowledge is created, not simply discovered by the mind (Schwandt, 1998). This suited my insider research, where I share similar roles as those whose views I will be researching. A constructivist approach is more appropriate than its polar opposite, realism, where a single 'truth' is sought, a truth which exists independent of individuals and their perceptions (Waring, 2012:16). The perceptions of participants in my research is crucial and it is possible that different people in the same school may have different perceptions due to factors such as their role.

There are some aspects of my research which belong closer to the realist tradition. While a constructivist approach would typically involve grounded theory, that is, the researcher investigating a phenomenon, but entering the setting without any preconceived theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), my approach has something in common with attitudes of natural scientists. Whereas

grounded theory involves a process of collecting and analysing qualitative data to generate a theory to explain a phenomenon (Chong, 2015:258), my research questions are designed to explore the established theory (as discussed in the literature review - neoliberalism created tensions which perpetuate neoliberalism itself) in a new area (decisions made by school governing boards relating to joining an academy trust). For this reason, Cupchik's notion of constructivist realism is of some relevance; where a social world exists prior to, and independent of, either positivist or constructivist analysis and qualitative and quantitative researchers both examine phenomena (2001). I started my research with observations from my professional experiences. This approach is closely linked to my positionality; as a professional working in the area I am researching, I have had plenty of time to observe and think before I started my doctorate – indeed it is this reflection which led to me wanting to begin an EdD - and during my research I explored these ideas further. It was therefore important that during my research I was aware of the potential phenomenon of confirmation bias. This is where I may have interpreted evidence in ways partial to my existing beliefs and expectations (Nickerson, 1998). Cohen et al.'s constructivist view of the researcher "co-constructing" meaning with those being researched shows that there is an extra need for caution. To help avoid bias, I used my supervisors as an external perspective to check my research at various stages, e.g. the coding of data and the interpretation of results.

Methodology

It is not always the case that there is a need to pick quantitative or qualitative methods. A mixed methods approach permits a more "complete utilisation of data" than separate quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis (Wisdom & Creswell, 2013:1) and proves that different paradigms can be combined into a single study (Symonds & Gorard, 2008). Johnson et al. argue that such a technique should not be seen as indecision or compromise, rather it provides "breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration" (2007:118). Mixed methods are not without criticism though; Denzin and Lincoln characterise mixed methods as a poor compromise of quantitative and qualitative methods which fails to secure the benefits of either approach (2008). Others though have taken a more positive view arguing that mixed methods is a distinct approach

in its own right with its "own worldview, vocabulary and techniques" (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003:ix).

To answer my research questions, I used a multiple case study approach which focused on three different schools. Yin argues that case studies are best used when research addresses either a descriptive question "what is happening or has happened?" or an explanatory question "how or why did something happen?" (2012:5). Both are pertinent to my research as I sought to focus on the influences on decisions around academisation. Yin also sees the benefit of case studies allowing data collection to happen in its natural surroundings (ibid.). Given my insider role, I believe I am well positioned to navigate such surroundings. With regards to this being insider research, I took a number of precautions as described in figure 3.1. Unluer states that it is crucial for the researcher to clarify their role to readers of the research in relation to the organisations which are the focus of their research (2012). Based on Unluer's work three issues are outlined below, along with how I mitigated against them:

Issue	Mitigation
Familiarity may lead to a different perspective than that of someone who is an 'outsider'	As I have adopted a constructivist ontology (see more below) I held no pretence to maintaining objectivity, however, I have kept regular (monthly) contact with my supervisors during the data collection. They helped to provide an additional outsider perspective to balance my insider viewpoint.
Balancing the insider role with the role of the researcher	I kept regular (monthly) contact with my supervisors during the data collection and discussed issues with them. I have not shared the findings or conclusions from each case study school with the schools themselves or individuals in each school. The results will only be shared in my completed thesis.
The insider role of the researcher may influence responses from participants in the research	I did not research in the schools where I work, so as to avoid contact with those who I line manage. There was the potential of an issue of seniority even though I did not work in the schools because I am a National Leader of Education. I mitigated against this by not introducing myself as an NLE.

Figure 3.1: Mitigating issues with insider research

What is more, I intend to further embrace my connection with the subject matter by reflecting on my own personal experience and introduce autoethnography as an additional method. Chang warns that autoethnography has to go beyond "mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation" (2008:43) and so to this end, I will use my own, professional anecdotes where they connect with the cultural, neoliberal phenomena arising from the data.

For each case study I carried out the following activities:

- Survey each governor to find out basic contextual information including the analysis of governor relationships with the school through looking at governor postcodes (to understand the socio-economic disadvantage/advantage of governors with the socio-economic context of schools they serve), the reasons for them becoming a governor and their role on the governing board.
- Reviewed the minutes of governing board minutes over a period of around three years.
- Held semi-structured interviews with some of the governors.

For the two case studies which had already joined a MAT I also looked at a document called the scheme of delegation which outlines who in each MAT takes responsibility for different tasks and decisions. I will take each in turn and describe the activity and the reason for its use:

Governor Survey

For those involved in governance in the case study schools, I collected basic information about their role on the governing body, how long they have been a governor, how much time they estimate they spend on their governing duties, their professional background and the reason for their recruitment to the governing board, (see appendix 1 for complete list of questions). This information was needed to shed light on some of the key issues identified during the literature review of school governance; e.g. the time needed to govern, the role of professional skills and the associated issue of the difficulty finding governors in disadvantaged areas. For the latter, I analysed their home postcodes (to compare to the government's Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) and their professional background. I used IDACI to compare the typical socio-economic disadvantage/advantage of governors with the socio-economic context of schools they

serve. Postcodes were removed from the identity of each individual. Each postcode was compared to the IDACI rankings, with each creating an index of deprivation. The average of these numbers was found and used to compare with the postcodes of the schools where they govern. No postcode was used in isolation; they were only used to form the average. The postcodes ceased to be identifiable after this point.

To add further understanding of the governance context, I looked at the Scheme of Delegations for each MAT that the case study schools belong to. This will shed light on whether the issue identified in the literature review of local power moving towards the centre of MATs, is relevant to the case study schools.

Minutes of Governing Board Meetings

Looking at minutes from governing board minutes required a specific method for the analysis of textual data. Dealing with a largely text-based source of data, I employed the method of content analysis. This method provided a systematic way of interpreting text and identifying themes and patterns (Hseih & Shannon, 2005). Two approaches, conventional and directed, offered contrasting methods. Conventional content analysis would have started without pre-conceived ideas about what might be uncovered, while directed begins with the formation of categories used to sort and categorise the language. For the directed approach the researcher must feel "confident that initial coding will not bias the identification of relevant text" (Hseih & Shannon, 2005:1281). I believe that given the wording of my research questions, I started with a clear idea about the potential phenomenon occurring and therefore a directed approach was most appropriate.

I considered and rejected narrative analysis. Within textual data Yazan argues it is possible to find stories. Atkinson states that narrative analysis focuses on how individuals' identities are represented by language and symbols (2012). I feel this may be incompatible with my research considering my use of Foucault's governmentality and its emphasis on the state's "normalising forces" (McNay, 1994:133). I also used Foucauldian Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis, which I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter.

Interviews with Governors

In the semi-structured interviews six media stories were used as stimulus, two relating to each aforementioned neoliberal tension (see figure 3.2). The media stories take a particular view on the issues, with each tension accompanied by an article suggesting that there is a particular tension and another article suggesting the opposite point of view. While the use of media stories with strong points of view could be considered a weakness in the approach, as there is clear bias, I have decided that this is an appropriate course of action as all three of the tensions have been widely reported and discussed in the education sector. Therefore, I argue that the bias is already in existence; this approach accepts and embraces it. However, I acknowledge that awareness of such tensions may vary between governors. Some information will be redacted as it has been shown that certain publications have political connotations. For example, 71% of people recognise *The Guardian* as having leftwing views (YouGov 2017). To avoid responses being influenced by the media publication, the name of the publication was not revealed to the participant. Similarly, some articles reference either politicians or a political party. Again, to avoid political beliefs causing undue bias, this information was withheld.

After I explored the tensions through the eyes of those I interviewed, I then explored the actions of the school at different points over time. To explore how strongly the participant agreed with the tension, I used a Likert scale. This tests people's attitudes in a validated manner (Joshi et. al. 2015). I considered using a semantic differential scale, an approach to measuring the connotations of different elements such as events or people (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). With a semantic differential scale, respondents decide whether the product or service in question has a particular attribute through the use of two polar opposite adjectives and a scale connecting them. I believe that the Likert scale is a more appropriate method due to it encouraging respondents to think in a certain direction, typically a five-point scale and in terms of how strongly they agree with a particular suggestion. As some of the media reports have a firm suggestion of a particular tension being felt in the education sector, the Likert scale is more appropriate.

Tension	No tension	Extreme tension
1: Governance	*"Academies have more control over how they do things"* Guidance from the DfE which sets out the differences between academies and other types of schools. (DfE 2019f)	*"Founders give up managing Greenwich free school, citing excessive burden on governors"* The Guardian, August 22nd 2018 (The Guardian 2018b)
2: School Finance	*"Boris Johnson pledges £4.6bn per year extra for schools"* A report announcing a large increase in funding for English schools SchoolsWeek, June 29th 2019 (SchoolsWeek 2019)	*"St Helens schools in 'crisis' due to funding freezes"* A report about local councilors pass a motion stating that new funding for schools announced by Prime Minister Boris Johnson was not sufficient to avert a funding crisis. St. Helen's Reporter, November 1st 2019 (St. Helen's Reporter 2019)
3: The role of local authorities:	*"10 facts you need to know about academy schools"* A 'myth busting' article by the DfE which explains that conversion to academy status will not cause an increase in the bureaucratic and financial burden to schools. (DfE 2016b)	*"Third of councils to run out of money for statutory services by 2022"* A report setting out the financial pressures local authorities are under and detailing the challenges in providing services, including for schools, that they would have traditionally given. The Financial Times, July 2nd 2019 (The Financial Times 2019)

Figure 3.2: Summary of media stories used

The use of media materials was designed to enable people to uncover their own perceptions; I did not presume that these will always be fully formed before the research begins and, in line with my constructivist approach, the media materials allowed exploration of interviewees viewpoints.

To assist with the analysis of textual data, I used the software programme NVivo. The ability to code (referred to in NVivo as 'nodes') supported content analysis. Given the directed approach I took with content analysis, I used my experience of the field and the literature review to start with some codes based on my 'hunches' (Gibb, 2012:252) about what I was likely to discover. However, I did not exclude potential new codes as they were discovered. With large quantities of data, particularly from the minutes from governing board meetings, NVivo allowed me to organise my data and quickly find text (Gibbs 2012). Despite the large amount of text, I did not employ automatic functions such as pattern-based coding or text search functions (NVivo, 2014), as I did not want to risk feeling removed from the data (Fielding & Lee, 1998).

As is the case with meeting minutes, I also used Foucauldian Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis for interviews, which I will now discuss in more detail.

Discourse Analysis – Foucauldian Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis

With a large amount of text, produced by the minutes and the transcribed interviews there was much language to analyse. The analysis of discourse is the study of language in use (Fairclough, 1992) and in particular, the language "above a sentence" (Brown and Yule, 1983:1). Gee offers an important distinction between two types discourse: First there is "little d" which is language in use. Then there is "big D" which is language in use "plus other stuff" and is "embedded in a medley of social institutions" (2005:26-7). It is the social and political influences of this "other stuff" which will help me most to answer my research questions.

Schiffrin et al. (2003) give a definition focusing on three categories of discourse definitions: Anything beyond the sentence, language in use and a broader range of social practice connected to language. This third category relates to Foucault's idea, discussed in the literature review, that discourse is not just language; it is the system of thought which makes certain things thinkable and say-able by certain people. No particular approach to discourse can be said to be correct (Gee, 2005), but the third aspect of Schiffrin et al.'s definition, coupled with Foucault's focus on discourse's

normalising effects, is of the most interest to my research, as I was interested in the influence of neoliberalism and the power relations between governing boards and MATs.

I have employed aspects of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) with my data. A good deal of Foucault's writing was concerned with discourse and power. Foucault argues the success of power "is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms" (2008:86) and the omnipotent nature of discourse gives a comprehensive mechanism which is hiding in plain sight. What is normal (or the 'truth') in a society is an exercise of power:

> "Truth is linked in circular fashion with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and the effects of power which it induces and which extend it." (1980:133)

With a focus on the normalising forces of power, FDA helped me to gain insights into the effects of discourse in the context of governing boards considering joining MATs. Jäger and Maier describe a model where discourse leads to the dispositive. Dispositive is described as being multi-faceted, comprising of (i) discursive practices (i.e. speaking and thinking on the basis of knowledge, (ii) non-discursive practices (acting as a result of knowledge) and (iii) materialisations (the product of acting as a result of knowledge) (2009). In my research this looks like:

- Discursive practices: The discourse common in the field, i.e. how MATs and governance are referred to in national guidance.
- Non-discursive practices: The language and actions of governors as seen in minutes and interview data.
- Materialisations: The decisions made by a governing board, i.e. to join a MAT

Hodges et al. break discourse analysis down into three basic approaches (figure 3.4): Formal discourse and empirical discourse are the first two. Most relevant to me is the third, Critical Discourse Analysis.

Orientation to discourse	Sources of data	Analysis
Formal linguistic discourse (such as sociolinguistics)	Samples of written or oral language and texts	Microanalysis of linguistic, grammatical and semantic uses and meaning of text
Empirical discourse (such as conversation analysis and genre analysis)	Samples of written or oral language and texts *and* data on the "uses" of the text in social settings	Microanalysis and macroanalysis of the ways in which language and/or texts construct social practices
Critical discourse analysis	Samples of written or oral language and texts *and* data on the "uses" of the text in social settings *and* data on the institutions and individuals who produce and are produced by the language texts	Macroanalysis of how discourses (in many forms) construct what is possible for individuals to think and say

Figure 3.4 (Hodges et al. 2008:581): *Three approaches to discourse analysis*

As Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is concerned with how power is demonstrated through language it is an appropriate approach for my research. While closely related, it aims to go further than FDA and critique discourse in a way that "disentangles [discourse's] giant milling mass" (Jäger & Maier, 2009:36). A key scholar in this area is Norman Fairclough who assumes that language creates change and consequently language is a tool of power (1996). Fairclough did not intend every aspect of his three stages to be precisely followed, they are meant as a guide (ibid.) and I have used particularly his concepts of intertextuality and common sense, both of which I will explore further in chapter five.

Realist Governmentality

The focus on struggle in power relations that realist governmentality offers means CDA is more useful as a lens for my research than 'traditional' governmentality and understanding the interplay between the local and the national. In the academisation of the English school's system the success of national policy has been dependent on whether those operating at local level, i.e. governors, agree

with their school following the national policy. As discussed in the literature review, Stenson's realist governmentality allows a focus on the gap between what is attempted and what is accomplished (McKee, 2009). This is useful for my research considering my focus on two schools which have joined academy trusts and one that has not, both operating in a wider, national, context of a partially-academised system.

Sample

Through the multiple case study approach, I studied the aforementioned neoliberal tensions and governors' subsequent responses in three settings. As someone who works and governs in schools this is a case of insider research. Insider research is generally where someone is researching in a group to which they belong (Breen, 2017). Although I was not researching the schools in which I work or have worked, I did research schools near to me. I believe the access that being, to an extent, known to schools brought was of great benefit in terms of getting access.

While some research which utilises the case study approach may focus on one setting, Firestone & Herriott warn of the "radical particularism" of single case studies (1983:440). To guard against reading too much into findings from a single setting and drawing conclusions which may not be representative or generalisable, I studied three settings. To add a different dimension, each was a school at a different point in the chronology of academisation. One case study focused on a school which is on the cusp of deciding to become an academy, another had converted in the last couple of years, with an additional case study focused on a school which was an earlier adopter of academisation (see figure 3.3). I acknowledge that with three cases, it may not be appropriate to generalise my findings to academies in general. However, it could be that the findings identify factors potentially relevant to governance practices of other academies. Those factors may be useful to consider when designing wider studies into academy governance

Case study research allows for a certain amount of "eclecticism" in its approach (Day-Ashley, 2012:103) and my intention was to exploit this with the triangulation of data across three schools to develop reliability (Yin, 2012). Out of my research methods the interviews came last, with the other activities influencing the questions asked. I consider the minutes to be useful, but I am aware that they are performative documents. MacEachern's research into the use of minutes in an arts

organisation showed that the neutrality expected of such documents is not always realised. For example, in the organisation studied, minutes were manipulated by one person in order to successfully achieve their aim of disbanding of the organisation (1998). My hope was that the interviews demonstrate the lived reality of the work of the governing body. Although my interviews initially focused on the chairs of governors and headteachers, I also interviewed other governors in less senior roles. By going beyond simply interviewing participants, I hoped to find "awareness of anomaly" (Kuhn, 1996:56), i.e. do all governors say the same and is this the same as minutes of meetings? This was an attempt to discover clear insights into how the governing body has arrived at the decisions it has made. All governors were asked questions based around the three tensions with further questions arising from the context of each school's governing body.

	Case Study 1	Case Study 2	Case Study 3
Has school academised?	Yes, in the mid-part of the last decade	Yes, in the mid to latter years of the last decade	No, but have been actively considering it
Context	A smaller than average primary school in a rural, mostly affluent area. The school had an OFSTED rating of 'good'.	Primary sector school of average size in relatively affluent area. The school was rated 'good' by OFSTED although there had been some issues with previous leadership of the school.	Primary school in an urban area with relatively high levels of social and economic deprivation. The school's most recent OFSTED inspection resulted in a 'good' grade.
Governors who returned survey	5	7	8
Minutes	21 meetings over three years	30 meetings over three years	28 meetings over three years
Governors interviewed	4, chair of governors, headteacher, previous chair of governors, less experienced governor	3, chair of governors, headteacher, less experienced governor	3, chair of governors, headteacher, less experienced governor

Figure 3.3: Overview of case study schools

Figure 3.3 shows that the case study sites were each situated at a different point in the process of academisation. This enabled me to see how the neoliberal tensions caused by neoliberalism affected schools at different times, e.g. have financial difficulties become more or less pertinent? My own

professional experience suggests that there had been a gradual increase in the difficulties schools were experiencing relating to finance and this may have reached a crescendo between 2018 and 2019. The December 2019 general election was preceded by commitments by the main political parties to increase education funding (Conservative Party 2019 and Labour Party 2019), indicating an end to a period of austerity. By focusing on the tension schools experience over time, I hoped to be able to see if there has been a noticeable relaxation of tensions. In addition, if a school converted to an academy as a result of financial challenges, did these difficulties recede as a result of the change of status? It also enabled me to analyse governmentality's effects and see whether resistance is reduced owing to Foucault's aforementioned "regime of truth" (Gordon, 1980:132). That is, would resistance to academisation be least in the case study of the school which has been the academy the longest? In other words, would those governing in the school which has been exposed to the neoliberal academy framework for the longest period of time have been normalised? (Drawing on Foucault's idea that normalisation has become "one of the great instruments of power" (1979:184). I also hoped to shed light on the question of whether the neoliberal solution (academisation) to the neoliberal tensions is effective in relieving the tensions felt. I could only do this by using multiple case studies at different stages in academisation.

I am aware that I used a selective and opportunistic sample for my case studies. I make no pretence to the sample being representative of all schools; purposive sampling was preferred as it allowed me to select case studies where I was likely to gain the privileged access required (Etikan et al. 2016). I utilised my local professional connections in order to get such access. This led to the aforementioned issues of insider research, but I believe this was outweighed by the access I gained to the schools concerned. Compared to other sorts of sampling, my choice was robust. For example, opportunity or convenience sampling can be considered a relatively weak method with the assertion that participants are those who are most readily available to the researcher and that therefore it is difficult to generalise results (Fogelman & Comber, 2007). Opportunity sampling is considered useful in scenarios where the subjects are likely to be hard to reach (Brady, 2006). My belief is that by using my own network of professional contacts, I was able to gain access where others would not. Of significance is the fact that I was interviewing people who have a high level of knowledge. For this reason, I employed a subtype of purposive sampling: expert sampling. This sort of sampling is useful for when there is currently a lack of observational evidence and when

investigating new areas of research (Etikan et al. 2016). It is important to stress here that I am not just referring to the research participants' knowledge as headteachers or governors, but as experts of their local context and of the decisions that have been made as well as the influencing factors.

Decisions around academisation are not likely to be made by any individual alone. While headteachers have positions of responsibility and power, any major strategic decision should be made by the governing board of a school (DfE 2017). Typically, the headteacher is a governor, but only one of around a dozen. It is therefore important that my research goes beyond the headteacher – often the focal point of the understanding of power in a school - and focuses on governors. Headteachers are usually ex officio governors and therefore will be interviewed too; and given some research suggesting that headteachers can greatly influence board decision making, it would have been remiss of me not to include them in the interviews. A minor point of interest in my research was whether what is stated in the legislative framework, i.e. governors should decide collectively, was borne out in practice. Do some governors, e.g. headteachers and chair of governors have more influence than others? To get the views of a range of governors I ensured I interviewed less senior governors as well as chairs and headteachers.

As discussed in my literature review, a key aspect of contemporary school governance is the focus on the professional skills of governors. In answering my second research question, I was interested in discovering whether the economic context of a school is an influence, i.e. did schools (such as Case Study 3) serving a deprived community struggle to recruit governors with professional skills and if so did this make local governance less tenable, therefore increasing the chances of joining an academy trust? The postcode analysis was designed to help me understand the economic context of the school and, alongside a survey of governors, the link between governors and the school/local area.

Ethics

In terms of the potential identification of those in the research, no participants, be they individuals or schools are named. Care has been taken to remove details which could have made it possible to identify those involved. Particular care has been taken with postcodes: As mentioned previously, these are only used to create an average level of advantage/disadvantage across a group. No

individual postcodes have been used in isolation, nor linked to a named individual. The professional backgrounds are not attached to names or postcodes, i.e. they are shown on two separate lists. Data has been stored using Birmingham City University's cloud storage devices. Data will be kept until the completion of studies or five years, whichever is sooner. When it is deleted, this will be in line with guidance from the Birmingham City University IT department. Physical data will be limited, but transferred directly between locations by private car. The pandemic limited the need to travel between destinations as interview took place online. Data will be destroyed in line with Birmingham City University's confidential waste facilities.

In terms of protecting research participants, I made the following considerations: Each interview was intended to take place at a professional venue linked to the subject, e.g. offices of the MAT, or school, however COVID meant that all interviews took place online. I was aware that different participants in the research from the same school may have had different opinions and so it was important that I was sensitive to such differences, for example by not naming who had which view. It was also important that I didn't inadvertently share with one interviewee what others have said, otherwise this might have influenced them. I was responsible for obtaining consent from all participants and this was on a fully informed basis. Participants had two weeks to decide if they want to take part and could withdraw at any time. Consent forms were used and it was envisaged that, due to the governance role of participants they would be fluent in English. All participants were given the chance to opt out of the process and have their data removed. Transcripts from the interview were shared with the interviewees. This allowed them the chance to amend for accuracy, but also allowed me the chance to continue the dialogue beyond the original interview. Participants will have a copy of the final thesis shared with them. I am aware of the possibility of insiders being able to identify other insiders from my assignment. To minimise this, I have been careful not to include in my thesis information which could be used to identify others. There has been some criticism of MATs, much of it from an ethical viewpoint, e.g. controversially high salaries for chief executives of trusts. I was aware that my research might touch on issues which are sensitive to those participating. Again, anonymity is important to protect those involved. The right to withdraw from the research is another safeguard that I gave.

Part of the reason each school was chosen as a case study was because of its position on its timeline to academisation (see figure 3.3, pg. 57). I selected the organisations because of the circumstances

regarding academisation and through my professional networks. They are all from the West Midlands region and are all schools I know, or I know people involved with the school. I wrote to each participant to ask for permission for interview. All those recruited consented to their involvement. Their role in the research was explained and how I use their data and their right to withdraw was made clear, both verbally and in writing. I looked at the relevant governor meeting minutes from their board meetings.

In order to ensure my research would be conducted in accordance with recent changes in data protection legislation, I explained to participants how I would be using their personal data, and what their rights were under the law. To achieve this, I used the transparency wording template available on Birmingham City's HELS Research Integrity Moodle site.

In the following chapters I will analyse the data gathered. Chapter 4 will detail the basic information about governors in each case study setting, obtained by the survey. As well as this, I will also analyse the Schemes of Delegations, publicly available documents, that exist in the trusts the schools belong to. Chapter 5 will look at my research through the lens of critical discourse analysis. Chapter 6 will analyse the data gathered through reviewing minutes of governing board meetings and interviewing governors themselves.

Chapter 4: Data and analysis from governor surveys

In this and the following chapters I will look at the data gathered, beginning with the information from the surveys. The survey collected basic information about governors in the three case study settings. This helped to provide context to each case study school, which I added to by analysing the relevant Schemes of Delegations, a document which all MATs are required to have which sets out which people in a trust have certain responsibilities. In order to preserve anonymity, I have not presented the results by school, but instead grouped the results together.

As part of the case studies I asked governors at each school to answer a series of questions. This was to enable me to understand the context of each governing body, particularly in relation to the themes identified in the literature review, such as the shift in governance from stakeholder representation to professional skills and the impact this has on schools in disadvantaged areas where such skills may be less prevalent. The questions asked (see appendix 1 for a complete list) are grouped under the following categories:

First, I asked about the socio-economic context of governors compared to the socio-economic context of the schools in which they govern. This involved asking about their profession and where they lived. This is important to my research questions as, given the evidence in the literature review that current expectations around the professional skills that governors should possess is harder to attain for schools in disadvantaged areas (James et al. 2014), locally based governance may be less tenable in some schools and this may encourage these schools to join MATs.

Secondly. I asked about the time commitment involved in governing. This is to understand the workload of governors, as there is some evidence in the literature review that governance is increasingly unmanageable. Again, this may encourage joining a MAT.

Next, I asked questions about governors' connections with the school in which they govern. The literature review showed criticisms of the skill-based approach to governor recruitment, suggesting that it displaced local connections. This question will help explain if there are strong local connections in each case study. I also attempted to uncover the motivations for governing. Why

did they want to become a governor and why were they appointed? This was to understand the extent to which professional skills drove governor recruitment in each school.

I then asked about how experienced governors are at governing. This was to help understand their experience of school governance and how immersed they are in the world of school governance and education. Has this influenced their deliberating over joining a MAT?

Finally, I asked about governors' knowledge of four key texts (Governance Handbook, Governor Competency Framework, OFSTED Inspection Handbook and the Academies Financial Handbook) which were identified in the literature review. This is to ascertain how influenced governors will have been by the content.

In addition to the above, I also explored the Scheme of Delegation for each of the academised schools' MATs (Case Studies 1 and 2). This added further context to the governance in each case study by allowing me to compare the distribution of powers with the consensus in the literature review of MATs taking away power from those operating locally, i.e. headteachers and local governors.

The number of governors surveyed is not large (twenty governors responded out of thirty-one – 63%) and I make no claim that conclusions I draw are representative of school governance more widely. The point of this part of my research is to provide an understanding of the context of each governor and each school and to give an overview of broader patterns about governors across the sample. An understanding of this context will help me to better understand other aspects of my research and informed questions asked in the interviews. Not all governors answered every question. In a few cases I have limited the detail recorded below, or even in rare cases, redacted information if I thought there was a chance that anonymity was at risk.

The socio-economic background of governors compared to the schools in which they govern

Taking the postcodes of governors' home addresses, I used data from the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) to create an understanding of the socio-economic context of each school's governing board and compared this with IDACI ranking of each school's postcode. IDACI provides an Index of Multiple Deprivation Rank, a number between 1 and 32,482. The higher the

number the more affluent the area is in which the school is situated. All 32,482 points in the scale are ordered into deciles (Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government, 2019). Figure 4.1 details, by case study, the mean of each school's governors' deprivation rank and the corresponding decile. This can then be compared with the figures for each school. For Case Study 1, I provide two sets of figures: One governor has an unusually low IDACI score and this skewed the mean disproportionately. Consequently, the second row removes this one governor's data.

	Average of governors' Index of Multiple Deprivation Rank (The higher the more affluent)	Average of governors' Index of Multiple Deprivation Decile (The higher the more affluent)	School's Index of Multiple Deprivation Rank (The higher the more affluent)	School's Index of Multiple Deprivation Decile (The higher the more affluent)
Case Study 1	18,876	6	22,960	7
Case Study 1 with one governor removed	22,385	7	22,960	7
Case Study 2	26,131	8.4	27,508	9
Case Study 3	19,698	6.3	7,521	3

Figure 4.1: IDACI rankings of governors

With a maximum rank of 32,482, it is clear that two of the case study schools are situated in relatively affluent areas. Case Study 3 is in a disadvantaged area, yet the data suggest that this is not reflected in governors' socio-economic backgrounds. I suggest that some of the concerns outlined in my literature review – see Young 2015, Wilkins 2016a and Connolly 2017 – have some basis; the emphasis on a skillset approach makes it difficult for those from a low socio-economic background to contribute to school governance govern. Indeed, only two governors had a postcode ranking in the lower half of the rankings.

Figure 4.2 provides further evidence that governors are recruited from a small section of society. It lists the professions of governors surveyed. To ensure anonymity I have listed all responses, rather than linking them to the particular case studies. For the same reason, I have also given a less detailed explanation of the roles than were given in the surveys.

- Retired. Worked in engineering
- Lawyer
- HR manager
- Teacher
- Retired. Was a magistrate.
- Doctor
- Accountant.
- Teacher
- Manager in the third sector
- Retired. Was a teacher.
- Managing Director of a company
- Teacher, but currently a stay at home Mum
- Teacher
- Manager of a small business
- Manager in an international company
- Dean of Higher Education at a Further Education College
- Retired. Was a finance director
- Procurement Manager
- Professor of Education
- Teacher

Figure 4.2: Profession of governors

This adds depth to the argument that people from certain backgrounds (such as those for whom English is not their first language (James, 2011) or those from disadvantaged backgrounds (James

et al. 2014) are being excluded from governance. Without exception governors hold (or held, for those retired) professional roles. For example, one retiree had previously been a finance director in a FTSE 250 company and is currently balancing her governing role with being a trustee of a multi-billion-pound pension scheme. Such high-level experience is rare; if these are the sort of skills valued, there are few who can govern. Further light is cast on this in figure 4.3 which uses the International Standard Classification of Occupations (2008) to map the roles identified above against a framework for labour classification. Through this it is possible to see the professional background of people involved in governance.

ILO classification	Number of people in this classification
1. Managers	8
2. Professional	12
3. Technicians and associate professionals	0
4. Clerical support workers	0
5. Service and sales workers	0
6. Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers	0
7. Craft and related trades workers	0
8. Plant and machine operators, and assemblers	0
9. Elementary occupations	0
10. Armed forces occupations	0

Figure 4.3: Classification of roles. Adapted from International Standard Classification of Occupations (2008)

For both figures 4.2 and 4.3 I also analysed by gender, to explore whether the focus on professional skills mean that one gender is excluded. There was no evidence from my data that this was the case, with women being slightly in the majority.

As discussed in the literature review, there is a well-established trend towards appointing governors based on their skills, rather than their links as stakeholders. Governing bodies from the 1980s onwards selected governors for the purpose of representing a school's 'stakeholders' e.g. parents, the local authority, staff, etc. (Baxter, 2016). The central tenet of the stakeholder model is that institutions should "be strategically led by individuals who are representative of and from the groups that have an interest in them" (Connolly, 2017:5). Over the last couple of decades, a new approach towards governance has emerged which fits the neoliberal and managerial paradigms, that of selecting governors by the professional skills they can bring to a governing body. Young points out that the two are not compatible: "a managerial discourse pre-empts alternative understandings of lay engagement such as a democratic discourse" (2015:13). Developing alongside this has been a shift in the construction of the identities of traditional stakeholders in school, e.g. parents, with neoliberalism influencing a reclassification of parents as "active/passive" and "effective/ineffective" (Olmedo & Wilkins, 2016:2).

From the data in my survey, it is possible to conclude that there is a high concentration of professional skills in the governing bodies of the case study schools, although this comes at the expense of having a representative cross section of the population. While it is outside the remit of my research to reach anything more than a tentative conclusion in this area and I make no attempt to extrapolate these results beyond the three case study schools, I think it provides an important part of the context in which governance take places in these three schools. It affirms research from the literature review and suggests and gap between the socio-cultural background of governors and the parents and families of pupils at the schools.

Governors Connections with the Schools

There were a range of links between governors and the schools they govern in. Figure 4.4 shows the links and the frequency with which they were applicable.

Connection to the school	Number of governors this applies to
Attended the school as a child	1
Children currently or previously attended the school	9
Grandchildren currently or previously attended the school	1
Live near the school or used to live near the school	13
Work at the school	4
None of the above	1

Figure 4.4: Governors' connections with the schools in which they govern

Some governors ticked more than one type of connection. Only one governor had none of the stated links. Parent governors and local residents are a prominent feature, in fact eight governors met both of these criteria. This suggests some nuance to some of the literature on contemporary school governance; stakeholder governance is not quite a relic. In the literature review I identified a significant amount of writing on the shift from stakeholder to skillset governance. In the neoliberal climate approaches to school governance have changed; a managerial discourse, focused on professional skills, has replaced alternative understandings such as a democratic discourse (Young, 2015). A more democratic focused approach where there is carefully planned stakeholder representation (Connolly, 2017) is out of favour. Yet a significant proportion of governors in the case study schools live in the community of their schools and are parents, or, to a lesser extent, staff.

It has been argued that the individualism that characterises modern society has led to less democracy (Klikauer, 2013) and there has been a decline from democratic accountability that was a feature in governance structures from the 1960s and 1970s (Baxter, 2016). Wilkins has written that if a form of democracy does still exist in the English education system, 'it is one reserved for the skilled and committed' (2016a:147). This may well be the best way of describing the democratic representation on the three case study governing boards; staff and parents have been elected, but it

is likely to only be a small proportion of parents who have the time required available (see below) and also the professional skills to feel able to put themselves forward for such a role.

It was interesting to see that the case study school with the fewest governors living in the area local to the school was the case study in the most disadvantaged area, Case Study 3. This supports the idea that the more disadvantaged the community, the harder it is to find willing parents or those with professional skills, a trend heightened where the community comprises a number of minority ethnic groups and where English is not the first language (James, 2011). It was also interesting that this school had two governors who had lived in close proximity to the school, but had moved away – perhaps a 'local boy makes good' scenario. However, the conditions created make it harder for such a school to rely on the local community as they are perhaps not likely to have the required professional skills. To return to my research questions, there is clearly a neoliberal tension that is particularly felt in schools in a disadvantaged area, such as Case Study 3.

Time spent governing

The mean number of hours governors estimated they spent on their roles over the course of a year ranged from 34 (Case Study 1), 46 (Case Study 3) to 44 (Case Study 3). The conclusion that I make here is that even though it is generally thought that governors in MATs have less decision-making power, this does not necessarily result in less time spent on governing - only one of the two spend less hours governing than the school which is yet to become an academy. Another conclusion is that governors commit significant amount of time to their roles. The considerable time commitment fits in with broader surveys of school governance. The National Governance Association has found that nearly a quarter of governing board chairs reported that the time they dedicate to governance was "somewhat or completely unmanageable" and only 22% of employed respondents said the time commitment was completely manageable (NGA, 2019b:8).

A governor in one of the case study schools was considering whether she could continue in the role due to difficulties in balancing family, work and governance commitments:

> "I've been wondering whether it might be best if I step down from my role [as Parent Governor]. I find myself in a situation where work has become incredibly busy, and my

husband's too. It is difficult managing childcare. So, I am finding that the above is making it hard to uphold my commitment to the school."

Governor recruitment and retention is something that featured in my interviews with headteachers and chairs of governors and I will return to this later in my research.

How experienced are the governors?

The length of time governors had held their position is detailed in figure 4.5

School	Mean number of years
Case Study 1	3.1
Case Study 2	4.1
Case Study 3	4

Figure 4.5: Length of time governing

The most experienced governor had been at their school for thirteen years. Five governors surveyed had been a governor at another school. To put these findings in a broader perspective, figure 4.6 shows the findings from the National Governance Association nationwide survey of 2019:

Amount of time involved in governance of a school	% of respondents
Less than 12 months	7.8
1-4 years	30.8
5-8 years	19.2
Over 8 years	42.2

Figure 4.6 (NGA, 2019:25)

In the case study schools only one had been governing for more than eight years in their current school. It is perhaps surprising that the most common length of time for governing is the longest

bracket of years, although this may reflect the self-selecting nature of the NGA survey; those who are most interested in governance are perhaps most likely to complete such a survey.

Motivations for governing

Governors were asked to give an overview why they wanted to become a governor. Figure 4.7 lists the reasons why each governor wanted to take up their role as well the reason they perceived the governing board appointed them.

Case Study 1		
Reason governor wanted to govern	Reason the board appointed the governor	Category of governor
"To support my local school by utilising my experience working in education."	Elected by parents; Hold a particular professional skill; Appointed by Church/ Parochial Church Council	Co-opted
"The vicar (foundation Governor) retired due to ill health, so I agreed to stand in on a temporary basis during the interregnum."	Appointed by Church/Parochial Church Council;	Foundation
"To support the school that my child attends."	Elected by parents;	Parent
"My oldest child was attending the school and my other two children then joined."	Elected by parents; Holds a particular professional skill	Co-opted, was previously parent

Case Study 2		
Reason governor wanted to govern	Reason the board appointed the governor	Category of governor
"My children had been to the school and wanted to give something back."	Elected by parents	Co-opted, was previously parent
"I thought my skills as a lawyer would be useful. My children went to the school and it was going through some changes. I wanted to play a role of help the school develop."	Holds a particular professional skill;	Co-opted
"I was interested in how schools work in terms of governance. I think education is of the greatest importance and I was interested in how I could be involved."	Elected by parents	Parent
"I was asked by a PCC [parochial church council]. As a local resident I was interested in doing what I can to help the school."	Appointed by Church/PCC;	Foundation
"I am interested in how school governance works and thought I could represent the views of staff."	Elected by staff	Staff
"I wasn't entirely sure about the direction the school was taking, so I wanted to get more involved."	Hold a particular professional skill	Co-opted
[Reason redacted to ensure anonymity.]	Hold a particular professional skill	Co-opted

Case Study 3		
Reason governor wanted to govern	Reason the board appointed the governor	Category of governor
"I was unhappy with the direction the school was taking and wanted to get more involved at a local level."	Hold a particular professional skill	Co-opted
"I was new to the school and thought it would be a good way to find out how the school works and understand the governors' roles in the decision making. I also wanted to help make a difference in the school."	Elected by staff	Staff
"I wanted to do something that would make me feel that I was putting back something to society. Also having had a dad who was a teacher all his life I know how important education is in supporting children into modern life – it's good to be a small part of that process."	Co-opted by staff - I knew the head and was asked if I would consider a position and I did!	Co-opted
"Having retired after a long career working to help children, I wanted to continue using my skills. The position of governor enables me to do this."	Hold a particular professional skill - I have a wide range of skills pertaining to different areas of children's Education and needs.	Co-opted
"As a teacher, I have been interested in understanding school governance and management."	[No answer]	Co-opted

"I was a new parent in the school and wanted to have a better understanding of the school as well as an active role in its development."	Elected by staff; Asked by my daughter's teacher if I was interested	
"Many reasons…to give back to the community, to see a different side of education and to grow as a leader."	Holds a particular professional skill	

Figure 4.7: Governor roles and reasons for their appointment

It is clear that governors are frequently motivated by altruistic reasons. This is perhaps tempered slightly by their links with the schools in which they govern; with many choosing to govern in their children's school, it could be argued that there is a clear link between their efforts as a governor and their family benefitting. A variation on this theme, are governors who are motivated by what I call an activist altruism. Two governors mentioned how they were concerned with the direction the school was taking.

Seven governors referred to professional skills as the reason why the board appointed them, but eleven refer to some sort of stakeholder representation, either by parents, staff or the local church. This further challenges the idea that we have moved completely away from a stakeholder approach. However, "co-opted" was the most common classification of governor. Ten governors hold this title, usually used when a position is filled by someone who has been targeted as a useful member of the board because of specific skills they have.

For some governors it was notable that they were parents who had initially been parent governors, but had since moved to different roles. This was explained by the fact there was a fairly ready supply of new parent governors, but other roles were harder to fill. 'Old' parent governors moved to new roles and new parents were elected. This meant that there were more governors than there otherwise would have been, but the boards were parent heavy.

Schemes of Delegations

In addition to questions in the survey, I also looked at publicly available documents relating to the two MATs which the case study schools belong to. This is because the literature review indicated concern over the centralisation of decision making powers within MATs. A useful starting point for understanding how a MAT operates is the Scheme of Delegation (SoD). Publication of the SoD is mandatory and it must set out the structure and remit of the board and any committees (DfE, 2017a). Committees in this context include any local governing bodies, i.e. those who are concerned with governance in only one individual academy and would have once had considerable powers. The SoDs also indicate what powers are held by those who are employed by the MAT rather than those who volunteer in governance. Each academy's SoD gives a clear indication of who is responsible for certain tasks. To further understand the context in which each of the two case studies who have converted to an academy operate, I reviewed their SoD.

Although all MATs are expected to have a SoD, there is no common format or approach to the language used. To create a framework to compare documents structured differently, I used content analysis to identify commonality between the roles in different MATs. Four roles were established:

- Non-executive, central: An unremunerated role, similar to the traditional role of governors in schools, but working across all schools in the MAT.
- Executive, central: An employee or group of employees. In some MATs the central executive function refers to an individual, typically a CEO. In others it is a group of centrally employed people, i.e. people who are not employed in any one academy, but instead work across the MAT.
- Non-executive local: A governance role focusing on an individual academy within the MAT, essentially the local governing body.
- Executive, local: The senior paid employee within an academy, essentially the headteacher.

Figure 4.8 outlines the four roles alongside the terms used by each MAT alongside the descriptive term I will use to describe the role.

	Terms used in Scheme of Delegation			
Case Study 1's MAT	MAT Board	Chief Executive Officer	Local Governing Body	Executive head teacher or head teacher
Case Study 2's MAT	Directors	Chief Executive Officer or Executive Principal	Local Governing Body	Head teacher
Terms I will use	Non-executive, central	Executive, central	Non-executive, local	Executive, local

Figure 4.8: Terms used in Scheme of Delegation

The next step was to use content analysis to determine which of the roles held ultimate power in key areas. Most SoDs are reasonably long, running to several dozen pages and dealing with many different responsibilities. Consequently, I used the government's Governance Handbook which identifies the three core functions of governance:

- Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;
- Holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the performance management of staff; and
- Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent

(DfE 2017a:9)

To this I added another aspect to the second core function; the appointment of executive leaders is logically of great importance and sits alongside their line management.

Figure 4.9 shows where in the structure of each MAT decision making power lies. As this is based on the three core functions of governance, these are all significant decisions that have a notable influence over the running of the school. Some SoDs have a slightly more nuanced approach to signifying the location of decision making role, as they also indicate who has lesser roles, e.g. who

should be consulted, however the decision making roles are still clear and it is evident that no decision making power is held locally.

MAT	Activity	Central i.e. not specific to one school		Local i.e. focused on one school	
		Executive i.e. paid	Non-executive i.e. volunteer	Executive i.e. paid	Non-executive i.e. volunteer
Case Study 1	Appraisal of head	X			
	Appointment of head	X			
	Setting the budget		X		
	Setting the vision		X		
Case Study 2	Appraisal of head	X			
	Appointment of head		X		
	Setting the budget		X		
	Setting the vision		X		

Figure 4.9: Analysis of scheme of delegations

In the areas of vision setting and finance, all key powers are held centrally. Further analysis of the SoDs shows that those at local level are being tasked with "developing", "delivering", "monitoring" and "championing", rather than making decisions. At central level, the non-executive and executive share powers fairly evenly across the two MATs, with the non-executive holding slightly more. Neoliberal influences and regulations, as contained in the DfE's Academies Financial Handbook, create a framework which encourages homogeneity. This is at odds with the autonomy promised by the academies programme (Rudd & Goodson, 2017). Based on my experience of being the CEO a MAT and a non-executive director in another, a key driver in decisions to centralise powers is because the responsibility lies centrally. There is a wariness to delegate powers when responsibility must lie in the centre of the trust.

The review of the SoDs and the governor survey analysed in this chapter show that the neoliberal traits in school governance identified in the literature review are evident in the case study schools. There is a keen focus on professional skills and this creates some difficulty, particularly in the context of Case Study 3, the school in the most disadvantaged area. Pressures on governors such as the time needed to fulfil the role have perhaps made it a less attractive proposition (something I will explore later in the interviews) and this has perhaps created a reliance on people with local connections to school – something which is more characteristic of the stakeholder approach to governance.

Chapter 5: Critical Discourse Analysis

In the chapter following this, I analyse large amounts of textual data from minutes and interviews. Before I used critical discourse analysis (CDA), to help identify themes from the text I have employed content analysis, but to add richness to my research and to reach an understanding that goes beyond the sentence (Brown et al. 1983) I have used discourse analysis. More specifically, I have employed critical discourse analysis for the focus it brings to the reproduction of power. Given that I have employed a theoretical conceptualisation of governance which explains governance as an influence which places limits on people's choices, (i.e. makes some things acceptable and others not) critical discourse analysis is appropriate. In this chapter I will explain how specific aspects of critical discourse analysis have been used in my research to shed light on my research questions. I will use some examples from the textual data, but this will mostly be left to chapter six, where critical discourse analysis will continue to be used. In this chapter I argue that governors are encouraged through the use of a 'net' of related texts to think and act in certain ways.

A crucial stage of the critical discourse analysis process is interpretation. Fairclough explains that this stage helps to understand "participants' processes of text production as well as text interpretation by the analyst" (1996:161). The analyser's interpretations are not based purely on the discourse, but relate to their own views and beliefs, therefore, as previously stated, my positionality is important. Formal features of the texts act as cues that connect with the analyser's own background knowledge (1996). As someone who works in education, volunteers in various governor roles and researches education, I have a high level of knowledge, possibly higher than those I interviewed. Various boards I have served on have been through the academisation process, some have decided to convert and some have not. I have spent three years on a local governing board in a MAT and five years on central trust board in a MAT. This varied range of experiences should help me to understand the nuance of different research participant's context, but I am aware that I have still brought my own set of experiences and bias to the research and that it is important to understand the viewpoint of the research subjects.

Fairclough suggests six levels of interpretation, two relate to context (situational and intertextual) and four relating to the text (surface, meanings of utterance, local coherence and text structure) (1996). Surface and meanings of utterance are focused on the linguistic features of texts have less

relevance to my research. Certain texts are closely related to both mine and research participants' understanding of the context of schools and governance and here I refer to the concept of intertextuality (Fairclough, 2001). For this I refer to the four key texts referenced in the literature review: The Governor Competency Framework, the OFSTED Inspection Handbook, the Governance Handbook and Academies Financial Handbook. These provide common ground and ideas that Fairclough would describe as "presupposed" (1996:152).

The term intertextuality is used by Fairclough to describe the relationship of different texts and their subsequent influence. This intertextuality creates meaning over multiple texts with any discourse or text sitting within a "history" of related pieces (2001:127). When a person reads one of the texts, they do not do so with an empty mind; they do so with "background knowledge" (2001:128), or the influence of other texts.

There are certain texts which are related to both mine and research participants' understanding of the context of schools and school governance. Using my own knowledge and the educational policy landscape I have identified the aforementioned four key texts:

- Governance Handbook (DfE, 2020)

This document sets out the knowledge, skills and behaviours that the DfE believe school and academy governing boards need if they are going to be effective.

- Governor Competency Framework (DfE, 2017)

The *Competency Framework for Governors* sets out the knowledge, skills and behaviours required on school and academy governing boards. Governing boards are expected to use this when recruiting new governors. They conduct skills audits of those governors already serving, compare this with the skills in the Competency Framework, identify the gaps and recruit accordingly.

- OFSTED Inspection Handbook (OFSTED, 2019)

This document is for inspections of maintained schools and academies under Section 5 of the Education Act 2005 (the most common type of inspection). It sets out the evaluation criteria that inspectors use to make their judgements. This handbook is primarily a guide for inspectors on how

to carry out school inspections. However, it is made available to schools and other organisations to ensure that they are informed about the processes and procedures of inspection. The criteria are regularly used by headteachers and governors to self-evaluate their performance in between inspections.

- Academies Financial Handbook (Education and Skills Funding Agency, 2020)

The Academies Financial Handbook is the key document for academies which sets out what the government expects in terms of the use of public funds and how academies are run. Academies (both single trusts and multi academy trusts) are held accountable for meeting the rules in this document. There is also a considerable focus on the governance of trusts in this document.

In most cases, the four documents build upon previous versions. Figure 5.1 details the various iterations which have been published over the years. In the case of the documents with multiple versions, it is clear that each new version does not stand alone, the influence of what preceded it will still be felt in the education system.

Text	Current version	First version	Complete list of versions
Governance Handbook	2020	2013	2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2019, 2020
Governor Competency Framework	2017	2017	2017
OFSTED Inspection Handbook	2019	1992	2009, 2012, 2015, 2019 versions available online, earlier versions not available.
Academies Financial Handbook	2020	2012	2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020

Figure 5.1: History of key texts

For each of the four texts I have identified the tensions that arose from the literature review and link these to each of the four key texts. Table 5.2 shows each of the tensions and related themes and how

many times they occur in the textual data generated though governor interviews and governor minutes (which I will look at in more detail in the next chapter). References in the texts are explained in the final column.

Theme	Case Study 1 Academised four years ago	Case Study 2 Academised two years	Case Study 3 Considering becoming	How do the themes relate to the key texts? 1. Governance Handbook (DfE 2020) 2.Governor Competency Framework (DfE 2017) 3. OFSTED Inspection Handbook (OFSTED 2019) 4.Academies Financial Handbook (Education and Skills Funding Agency 2020)
Academisation process	9	1	1	No references
Government agenda	0	2	4	All four texts influence the way people in the education sector act. 1. The Governance Handbook sets out the "government's vision and priorities for effective school and trust governance" (2020:6). Seventy-seven pages (nearly half of the document) relate to the compliance section. 2. The Competency Framework enables the government to dictate "the competencies needed for effective governance" and is applicable to all governing boards (2017:4). 3. The consequences of not meeting expectations in the OSFTED inspection framework are severe, with an inadequate judgement potentially leading to forced academisation. 4. Written by the Education and Skills Funding Agency, an executive agency, sponsored by the Department for Education, this document contains a list of "musts" (where academies have to comply) and "shoulds" where the government's view of best practice is established. Sanctions can be applied to those who do not follow the guidance, including the re-brokering of academies to other MATs.
Increased regulations	0	1	0	4. The one reference from the minutes related to the Academies Financial Handbook. This complex document is a long list of actions needed and requirements. Mostly this is seen at the central executive or non-executive level, but there was one example from the minutes where a requirement set, led to additional work at the individual school level to ensure compliance.
Performativity and accountability among governors	2	11	5	1. The Governance Handbook makes clear that responsibility for governance in a MAT lies with the central non-executive (2020). In one example, accountability is tied with the concept of autonomy: The local governors in Case Study 1 are told that their accountability under the Multi Academy Trust remains the same as it did under the Local Authority, however liability now lies with the MAT Directors. Therefore the "MAT holds the responsibility for approving academy budgets, signing new contracts and lease agreements and appointing Head Teachers". 3. The OFSTED Inspection Handbooks states that "the Secretary of State has a duty to make an academy order for all maintained schools judged to have serious weaknesses…and those that require special measures" (2019:34). There was one example where one of the key parts of judging which MAT was best was how well the schools in the MAT had performed in OFSTED inspections and specifically the extent to which their inspection grade had improved after joining the MAT. In another reference governors were very wary of falling foul of a negative inspection. In Case Study

				1, the governors are told before conversion that 'mock OSFTEDs' would be carried out by the MAT. These were explained as "collaborative projects with the school and help to maintain a picture of performance."
Governor skillset and governor training	7	6	5	1. There are a multitude of references to training (pgs. 27, 28, 34, 37, 42, etc). Skills are routinely referred to and not only show what is needed to form a board, but also the limits: Boards should be "no larger than they need to be to have all the necessary skills to carry out their functions effectively" (2020:36) and in doing so the opportunity for local governors to participate is limited This was a new addition to the 2020 handbook and limits what governance is and what a board's purpose is. Skills audits and governor training are routinely mentioned throughout all of the governor minutes and interviews, the concepts seemingly hardwired into the functioning of the boards. 2. The professional skills needed is the point of this document, it exists specifically to outline "the principles and personal attributes…alongside the commitment of time and energy" needed to be a governor (2017:4). In doing so it also excludes those who are not eligible to be governors, e.g. those without the stated skills and time. 3. The OFSTED Handbook states that inspectors will judge whether "those responsible for governance understand their role and carry this out effectively. Governors/trustees ensure that the school has a clear vision and strategy and that resources are managed well and that leaders are held to account for the quality of education" (2019:76). There were several references to governors preparing for inspections, for example using consultants to ask the questions an OFSTED inspection might ask. 4. The AFH states that "trustees and management must have the skills, knowledge and experience to run the academy trust" (2020:10).
Sustainability of governance	6	3	8	Across the documents the details combine to create a challenging environment in which to govern. This was particularly felt in Case Study 3 which had the most challenging socio-economic context, with the headteacher stating that "governance is a challenge. And in a setting like this, one is definitely more of a challenge because as the creating and finding governors, even governors in the parent community is difficult." Case Study 1 had less of an issue here, perhaps due to the more affluent setting being home to professionals with the required skills set as dictated by the Competency Framework.
Financial sustainability	8	6	18	1. The Governance Handbook lists three core functions of the board, the third of which is overseeing financial performance and making sure money is well spent. There is evidence that this text is gradually tightening expectations around financial controls with a number of new requirements being introduced. Minutes and interview show that finance was a common area of focus. There was a general view that being part of a MAT would help in this area, even among schools, such as Case Study 1, where there was some existing expertise among governors. 2. The Competency Framework places financial knowledge very highly. All governors are expected to have some skill in this area with a need for at least one governor to have a more in-depth knowledge (2017:). On two occasions governor minutes referred to a need for more financial skills on the board. 3. Quoting the core functions of governance in the Governance Handbook, OFSTED inspectors are told to check that governors are overseeing the financial performance of the school, although the framework has much less focus on finance than teaching and learning. 4. Like the Governance Handbook, there are a number of new and higher expectations in the Academies Financial Handbook, relating to finance and governance arrangements.

Table 5.2: Themes in research in key texts

From table 4.11 it is clear that there is common ground across the four documents and at times they interact to reinforce certain points. For example, the OFSTED Handbook refers to the Governance Handbook and instructs inspectors to see if governors are meeting the expectations laid out:

> "The governance handbook also sets out the statutory functions of all boards, no matter what type of school or how many schools they govern. There are three core functions:
>
> - ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
> - holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils, and the performance management of staff
> - overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure that its money is well spent, including the pupil premium.
>
> Inspectors will explore how well governors carry out these functions." (DfE, 2019:66)

The documents promote each other, for example, the Academies Financial Handbook instructs governors to use the Governance Handbook as it "provides you with more information on the roles of members and trustees, and the skills, knowledge and behaviours that boards need to be effective" (2020:6). Together, the documents interrelate with each other to create a regulatory net which governors cannot avoid. In the Governance Handbook expectations are set out for the role of governors and the Governance Competency Framework dictates who should be governing. Added to this, the OFSTED Framework and Academies Financial Handbooks set out the punitive consequences if governors do not meet expectations. Combined this creates a challenging environment for governors and a policy direction which is hard to evade. My research questions explore whether neoliberal induced tensions have influenced schools to join MATs; I argue that intertextuality is a key factor influencing governors' decision making.

Fairclough's concept of intertextuality deals with the relationship between texts and audience; the interconnections between similar or related pieces that reflect and influence an audience's interpretation of the text (2001). However, in the four texts I have analysed there is a clear interplay between texts *before* the engagement with the audience. Texts relate and correspond to each other and this is key to decreasing the chance of actors deviating from government policy. They create two levels of intertextuality; first the texts written by the government and its agencies interact with

each other (what I refer to as lateral intertextuality) before this 'net' interacts with discourse at school level (I refer to this as hierarchical intertextuality), see figure 5.3.

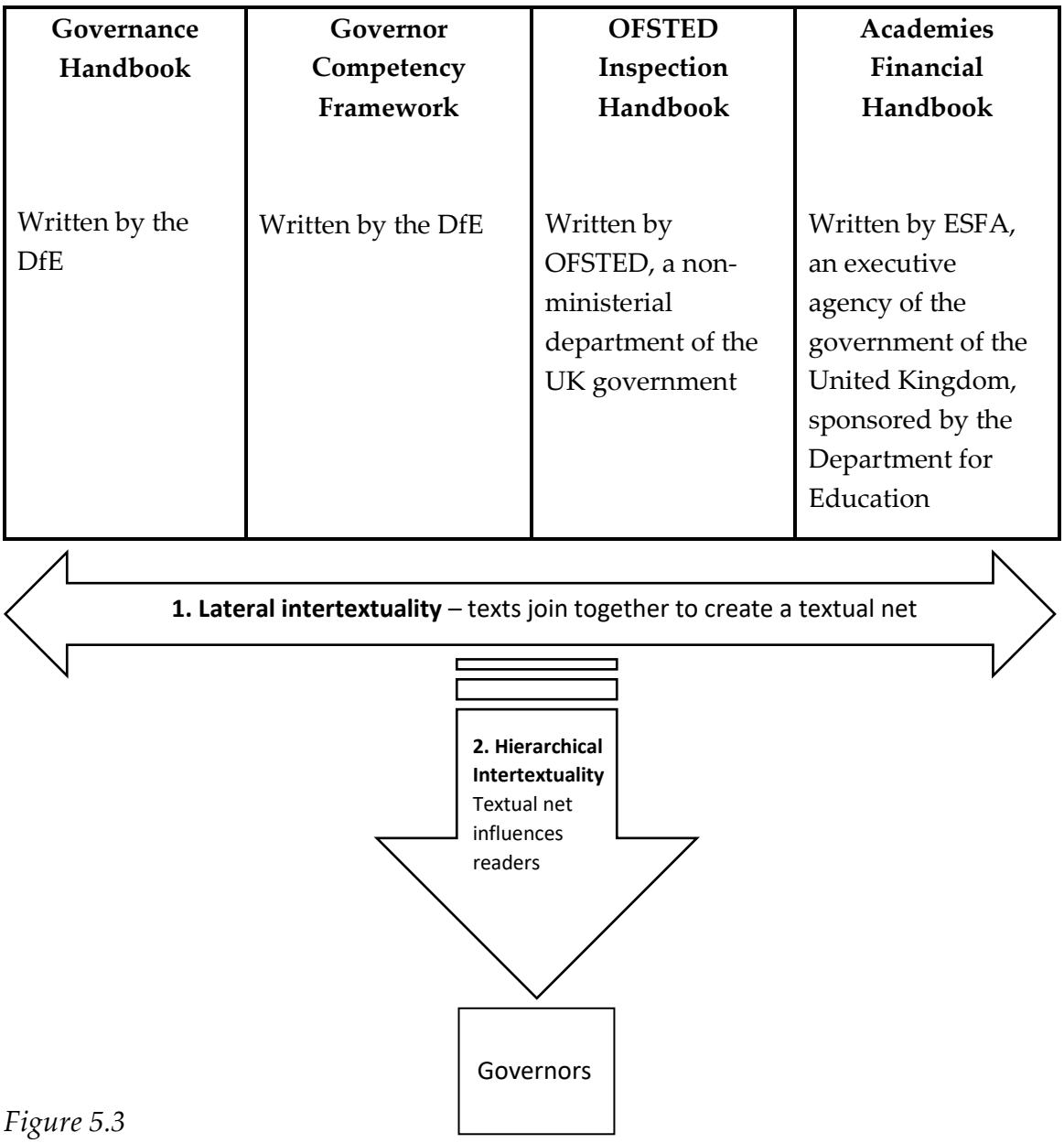

Figure 5.3

The controlling nature of this intertextuality is evident in the use of accountability in the texts I have identified. A key tenet of neoliberalism, accountability is seen as "wrapping" education in an "increasingly dense complex of standards, objectives and assessments, which are themselves tied to proliferating performance indexes at the state and district levels" (Lissovoy, 2013:427). In the next section I will take the theme of accountability and demonstrate the way it is woven through the key texts for governors.

In the forward for the Governor Competency Framework the National Schools' Commissioner David Carter writes (underlining added):

> "The role of governing boards in defining and implementing strategy whilst holding the leaders of schools and trusts to account has to be the foundation upon which a world class education system is built. Governors or trustees who work as a team, who are able to bring their skills and experience to the role and who blend challenge and support to hold their workforce to account, will improve standards." (DfE, 2017:3)

Here, the use of presuppositions is noteworthy. Certain assumptions are made by those in authority, which those with little power have little recourse to challenge - having power means you determine the presuppositions (Fairclough, 2001). The neoliberal ideals of valuing professional skills and expertise and holding people to account are emphasised and are held central to the chances of securing improvement. Carter stresses that this "*has* to be the foundation upon which a world class education system is built", but no evidence for this is offered, it is assumed to be correct and in doing so reveals not so much about the content of the text, but the content of the producer's interpretation (2001:127). 'World class' is a typical phrase of neoliberalism. It positions education as a function of national competitiveness in a global marketplace. The focus on holding to account is worth unpicking too. Baggini argues that it leads to a focus on winning arguments, rather than achieving the best overall outcome (2018).

The Governance Handbook places considerable emphasis on the duty of governors – their role is "above all, to drive relentless ambition for young people" (DfE, 2020:4). Central to this is accountability, a word used consistently throughout the document and often partnered with 'robust'. Governors are told to hold the executive "to account for the day-to-day running of the school(s), including the performance management of their staff" (DfE, 2020:23). This assumes that the way to secure improvement is for governors to performance manage the headteacher who in turn performance manages staff below them. Performance related pay, OFSTED inspections, exam result league tables, all combine to create a climate in education which is relentlessly focused on people being line managed and held to account. This excludes alternative views, such as those held by Jos de Blok the founder and CEO of Buurtzorg, a home healthcare organisation which has been voted the Netherland's employer of the year five times. de Blok says "managing is bullshit, just let

people do their job" and that attempts to motivate employers are "patronising" (Bregman, 2020:263-4).

Instead, neoliberal models of accountability dominate. In the OFSTED Inspection Framework reference is made to the high expectations of the Governance Handbook:

> "The governance handbook sets out the purpose of governance, which is to provide confident, strategic leadership, and to create robust accountability, oversight and assurance for educational and financial performance." (OFSTED, 2019:66)

The Handbook then charges inspectors to check that "those responsible for governance understand their role and carry this out effectively" (OFSTED, 2019:75). Inspectors will ask school leaders to "account for the results of the pupil and staff interviews and surveys" (OFSTED, 2019:54) – in other words, leaders are not just responsible for what pupils learn, but what they think too.

Across the range of participants in my data collection, there was, unsurprisingly, some variation in experience of education and governance. Five were currently, or had been teachers, with a further two in closely related fields, such as teacher training. While on average governors had been in their role for around four years, the complete range was from a few months to thirteen years. In the next chapter I will explore the link between how immersed governors are in the education world and the extent to which they are influenced by the intertextual themes. Those who were more fully immersed were more aware of, and in tune with, the themes, while those governors who were on the periphery, were less aware and therefore more likely to diverge from "normal", or (to borrow from Fairclough), "common sense" thinking. For example, the headteacher in Case Study 3 was open to joining a MAT due to the services being offered by the LA. The headteacher showed an absorption of neoliberal tropes such as the value of market approach and the freedom of the academy sector:

> "The services can be really quite poor. We think there are better options out there, but we are tied to the LA. Maybe a MAT would give us what we need."

In contrast a governor in Case Study 3, with only just over a year's experience, was not so convinced that joining a MAT would help.

"I think the LA are OK. Some services are fine, some not so, they're definitely not all great, but I think that they are no better or worse than anything an academy chain would do."

To explore the idea that the experience a governor has may influence their views, I propose a categorisation of the governors surveyed in which the amount of experience is split into three levels, see figure 5.4. Those with the most experience, typically more than four years of governance and some leadership role on the board, I place at the centre of the figure. Their role gives them the most exposure to the key texts of the role and other elements of the dominant neoliberal discourse and therefore possibly makes them most likely to be influenced. Those at levels 1 and 2 have less experience and I therefore argue are less likely to toe the neoliberal line.

Level 3 Experienced	Often acceptance neoliberal ideology as "common sense"
Level 2 Moderate experience	Generally some acceptance of neoliberal ideology. Can be deferential towards more senior governors.
Level 1 Relative novice	More likely to challenge neoliberal assumptions or be wary of challenge. Assumes the views of others are more important. May be intimidated by the complexity of governance and therefore less likely to dissent from the common sense view.

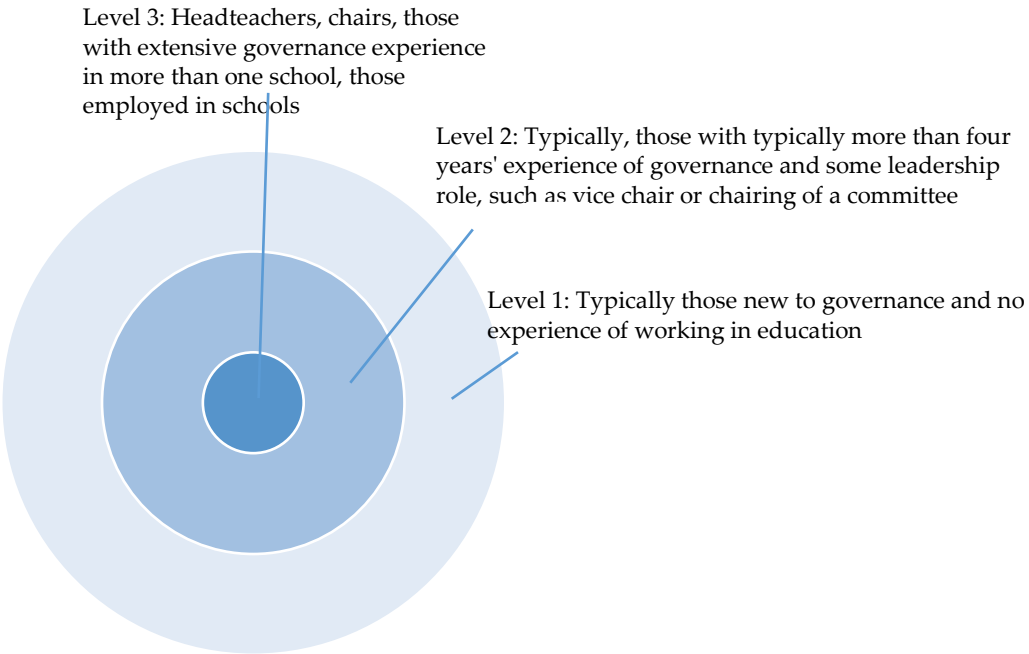

Figure 5.4

n = 16	Governance Handbook	Governor Competency Framework	OFSTED Handbook	Academies Financial Handbook
Number aware	14	11	16	8
Number not aware	2	5	0	8
Number read fully	3	3	5	1
Number read partly	10	7	3	3
Number not read	3	6	8	12

Figure 5.5: Governors' awareness of key texts

Figure 5.5 indicates that many governors are not very familiar with key texts, which intuitively should undermine the influence of intertextuality. However, there is some suggestion in my data that it is not necessary for people to read a text to be influenced by it. For example, in Case Studies 1 and 3, there had been recommendations by third parties that the board should conduct a skills audit, which would have almost certainly have been aligned to the Governor Competency Framework. There are numerous proformas available for use. Assuming these have been written by someone who has read the Governor Competency Framework, governors would be influenced by the document even if they haven't read it themselves. Certainly, the National Governance Association survey of governors provides further evidence for how well embedded skills audits had increasingly become in the work of governing bodies over recent years:

> "A consistently popular method of improving practice over the years is the use of a skills audit. This has increased gradually over time, from 72% of respondents in 2012, and is now well embedded in most governing boards' practice with 87% saying they used a skills audit in 2019. (NGA 2020a:14)

All case study boards had been influenced by the OFSTED framework; in the next chapter I will discuss examples of actions being justified because of the need to be ready for future inspections. The Governance Handbook and the Academies Financial Handbook had dictated some aspects of procedure too, although not in the case of Case Study 3 and the Academies Financial Handbook, as they were not yet an academy, they were not subject to the rules.

Figure 5.6 delves deeper into the data behind figure 5.5, using the categorisation of figure 5.4 to add another layer of analysis. It shows that familiarity of key texts increases with the experience of the governor. The data was also analysed by school, but no clear pattern was identified.

All, n = 16 Level 1, n = 2 Level 2, n = 7 Level 3, n = 7	Governance Handbook			Governor Competency Framework			OFSTED Handbook			Academies Financial Handbook		
	Novice	Some experience	Experienced	Novice	Some experience	Experienced	Novice	Some experience	Experienced	Novice	Some experience	Experienced
Number aware	1	6	7	1	4	6	2	7	7	0	4	4
Number not aware	1	1	0	1	3	1	0	0	0	2	3	3
Number read fully	0	0	3	0	1	2	0	2	3	0	0	1
Number read partly	0	6	4	0	3	4	1	1	1	0	1	2
Number not read	2	1	0	2	3	1	1	4	3	2	6	4

Figure 5.6 Governors' awareness of key texts, by experience (see figure 5.4 for definitions of levels)

Those who were at the centre of governance, namely the chair, headteacher and those who had many years of governance experience were, according to my data, more likely to echo the neoliberal ideas. Those on the periphery, (figure 5.4) had not been so immersed in the day-to-day world and are consequently less likely to hold the same views as those in the centre. This might suggest that they would be likely to question the direction of travel, but in my interviews, those with less

experience of governance seemed to lack the confidence to challenge. As demonstrated in one, relatively inexperienced, governor from Case Study 2's lack of confidence when being interviewed:

> "To be honest, I feel in no way expert in discussing academisation…I fear that x [chair] and y's [head] perspectives have probably shaped my own"

The use of the word "fear" is interesting. It suggests that the influence of more senior governors is not necessarily positive. Another relatively junior governor in Case Study 1 referred to views of the Chair on five occasions during the interview.

Another stage of Fairclough's critical discourse analysis process seeks to demonstrate that discourse is a social process and show "how it is determined by social structures, and what reproductive effects discourses can cumulatively have on those structures, sustaining them or changing them" (1996:163). In this stage there are two dimensions: The first is looking at discourse as part of a struggle and the second is looking at how power relationships create discourse (ibid.). Furthermore, both of these can be looked at three levels: Societal, institutional and situational (ibid.). As discussed in the literature review, both of these dimensions are relevant to academisation. There has been considerable opposition to academies and neoliberalism, with opposition from the political left and organisations like the Anti Academies Alliance. With regards to power, in academisation the power to make certain decisions, such as setting the school budget and appointing the headteacher shifts from the local (the governing board of the school) to the central in academy trust (either the CEO or the board of directors/trustees).

In the next chapter I discuss whether the minutes of governor board meetings gave an insight into power relations at the point at which conversion is being decided on. This is an almost paradoxical time for governors who have the option to convert, in other words they have the power to decide to give away their power. Their agency has perhaps never been greater, but they may soon lose much of it. I will return to this in the next chapter.

In Case Study 1, once the decision had been made to convert, progress was slowed by two external organisations. One was the local authority and the other was a small charitable organisation connected to the land the school occupied. The charity sought to maintain an independence by appointing their own solicitors when the MAT recommended a different firm. A new lease needed to be signed, but delays in appointing the solicitors led to this taking longer than originally

envisaged and the school joining the trust was delayed. When the LA were slow, governors found themselves with limited influence and so agreed to write to the local member of parliament and ask for him to lobby the LA.

Fairclough points out that power relationships are often borne of struggle (1996). In Case Study 1 we have two organisations who are afforded limited power in the process of academisation, (this lies with the school governors, the trust they were seeking to join and the Regional School Commissioner), in short, they cannot veto the process. Where there is no power to say "no", the only recourse is arguably to slow the process. While it is possible that both organisations were simply taking a cautious and diligent approach, it may be that the speed with which they acted, was a sign of struggle and symptomatic of the limited power they had.

In this chapter I have outlined the way CDA enables us to see how certain texts have influenced governors. This is particularly powerful among those most experienced as they are most familiar with the texts. Other views have the potential to be dismissed as they are not "common sense" (views which may be held by the less experienced as they have not been so influenced by the texts). In the next two chapters I will explore this further through the analysis of minutes and interviews.

Chapter 6: Data and analysis of minutes and interviews

In this chapter I will look more comprehensively at the data from governor minutes and interviews. I will refer to themes from the literature review and compare this with themes emerging from the data. I will continue to use aspects of critical discourse analysis, but I will begin by using content analysis to highlight themes across the textual data.

As I had a large amount of text to analyse from the governor minutes and transcripts of interviews. All Microsoft Word documents were uploaded to NVivo and coded based on points of interest. Figure 6.1 outlines both the pre-defined codes, that is codes relating to the three tensions which were created from the literature review before the text was analysed, alongside emerging codes which were created inductively. These are not necessarily tensions, but themes that emerged. The three tensions are broken down into sub-codes to capture greater detail and nuance. Figure also 6.1 summarises the coding for the data collected in terms of the number of times a topic is mentioned.

Coding	Description of coding	Case Study 1	Case Study 2	Case Study 3
Academisation being negative	Where a discussion has focused on academisation bringing negative consequences to the school	5	8	1
Academisation being positive	Where a discussion has focused on academisation bringing positive benefits to the school	6	19	9
Academisation process	Where a discussion focused on the process of becoming an academy	9	1	1
Autonomy	Where a discussion focused on the extent to which academisation has restricted or may restrict the ability of the school to make a decision for itself as opposed to MAT making such a decision on behalf of the school.	16	24	23
Government agenda	Where a discussion focussed on the wishes of the government of the day	0	2	4
Increased regulations	Where a discussion focussed on the regulations being an academy brings.	0	1	0
Performativity	Where a discussion gave the researcher reason to think about neoliberal traits of performativity.	0	2	0
Potential academisation influencing decisions	Where a discussion gave the researcher reason to think that the school was making decision because they were considering, or were soon to be, an academy.	1	2	1
Size of the MAT	Where a discussion focused on the size of a MAT.	0	2	0
Tension 1: Neoliberal influences on school governance				
Accountability	Where a discussion focussed on the impact of performative measures on governors.	2	9	5
Governor skillset	Where a discussion focussed on the expectation for governing boards to have certain professional skills.	3	3	2

Governor training	Where a discussion focussed on the need/expectation for governors to have certain governor-specific skills.	4	3	3
Stakeholder voice	Where a discussion focussed on the voice of local stakeholders, e.g. parents, staff, local residents, etc.	1	1	4
Sustainability of governance	Where a discussion focussed on any difficulties felt in maintaining a functioning governing board which can meet the expectations made of it.	6	3	8
Tension 2: Financial constraints (post 2008 financial crisis)				
Financial sustainability	Where a discussion focussed on the long-term financial sustainability of the school.	8	6	18
Tension 3: The decline in the role of local authorities				
Role of LA being positive	Where a discussion focussed on positive interactions with the school's local authority.	6	9	4
Role of LA being negative	Where a discussion focussed on negative interactions with the school's local authority.	0	2	15
Reasons for converting	Where a discussion focussed on reasons to become an academy	4	0	1
Neoliberalism and governmentality	Where a discussion gave the researcher reason to think about neoliberal traits being adopted by the school or individuals leading the school.	1	0	0
Socio-economic context of school	Where a discussion referred to the social economic context of the area the school was located in.	1	0	1
	Total number of references	**73**	**87**	**100**

Figure 6.1: Coding of data

The following points are of particular interest and will be explored in the following sections:

- References to 'government agenda' recede the longer the school had been an academy. I suggest that this supports the idea of the government's agenda becoming "common sense"; policy becomes naturalised and is no longer subject to critical interrogation.

- References to performance measures, especially OFSTED and pupil outcomes should be borne in mind alongside the evidence that academies are not a panacea for school improvement (Gorard 2014, Andrew et al. 2017). Much of the push for academisation in the early 2010s was based on the argument that academies would perform better (DfE, 2010). With the argument lost, a new argument has arisen; not that academies are better, but some MATs are better at school improvement than other MATs or LAs. This was a claim made by the MATs that involved with the case study schools.
- Financial and governance sustainability featured much more in Case Study 3's discussions, than in the early conversions. This suggests a tightening of neoliberal tensions over recent years. There is also an increased focus on autonomy – which perhaps relates to the issues experienced by schools which have converted before.

In the next section I will give an account of the content of the minutes of the governing board meetings at each of the case study schools. Each case study begins with a brief overview of the context of the school. This detail is kept to a minimum in order to protect the identity of the school. In this space I also detail the time period the minutes cover and how many meetings they relate to. After the setting of the context I address themes which arise when looking at the minutes. For all of the case studies I look at the three themes which relate to the three tensions and any other themes which emerged.

Governor Minutes Case Study 1

Case Study 1 is a smaller than average primary sector school in a rural, mostly affluent area. The school had an OFSTED rating of 'good'. When the school converted in the mid part of the last decade, the governing body had been considering academisation for over 3 years. The budget was a constant challenge. The minutes refer to the board having two driving reasons for academisation:

- Maintaining and improving the standard of education at the school
- Securing the future viability of the school

During the period the minutes relate to there was a change of headteacher. The period analysed covered three years, approximately eighteen months prior to academisation and eighteen months after and covers twenty-one different meetings. Discussions about joining a MAT focused on one possible local trust in particular with which the school has some existing links. The MAT was a reasonably large trust with over a dozen schools at the time of conversion.

<u>Tension 1: Neoliberal influences on school governance</u>

As discussed in the literature review, research has shown that for many schools recruiting a full complement of governors is a challenge, this was not so much the case at this school. In one meeting it was recorded that the MAT had pointed out that the Terms of Reference for local governing bodies state that there should be a maximum of eight governors on the full governing body, while this school had nine. The MAT had said that it was "acceptable in the short term" that the school continued with nine governors. It should be pointed out that a board of either eight or nine governors is less than the average number of governors: Just over 60% of boards have more than ten governors (NGA, 2019). Here there is an interpretation that the reduction of the number governors, sits alongside the scheme of delegation in being part of the reduction of power being held locally. It may also be the case that the high bar set for being a governor in terms of the professional skills required means there can be no alternative but to reduce the number of governors.

The neoliberal trope of valuing professional skills was well embedded. The literature review refers to the constant "measuring of performance and productivity" in neoliberalism (Shore & Wright, 1999:559) and this is not reserved for the employees of schools, but for those volunteering as governors too. On more than one occasion, audits of governors' skills were discussed. Before the school joined the MAT, a request was made that an audit was carried out, so this appears to be something the trust were very focused on. In another minute after conversion, it was highlighted that there were two areas of weakness identified in the audit - teaching and safeguarding. The local governing board had reported back to the MAT about how it would fill these gaps and the chair of governors reported that the MAT was satisfied with this response. There was no dissention or objection from the governors to such practice which lends more credence to the idea that contentious neoliberal ideas about professional skills trumping educational knowledge had become 'common sense'.

Once the school had converted, governors were not clear about their roles in the governance structure of the MAT. There were numerous references to this issue over several meetings. Time and training were needed to help governors understand their new role and information sought from the MAT. In one meeting a member of the MAT's executive team came to explain to governors what their role was. They are recorded as saying that liability now lies with the MAT Directors. The MAT therefore holds the responsibility for approving academy budgets, signing new contracts and lease agreements and appointing headteachers. This is clear evidence for the influence of accountability – the logic being that the power must lie with those who are ultimately accountable.

When there was a need to recruit a new headteacher, the governors were unsure of their role in the process. As one minute notes:

> "Governors referred to the MAT 'Scheme of Delegation' to clarify their responsibilities in the recruitment of a headteacher, they found that the MAT is responsible for leading the recruitment process and the LGB responsible for providing representation on the recruitment panel."

The uncertainty over who does what may go some way to undermining the supposed benefit of joining a trust, that is, sharing the load of governance with a central non-executive or executive. Owing to the confusion over who does what, there was a danger of some roles being carried out twice. The uncertainty could also lead to an undermining of the role of local governors; if someone is unsure of their role, how do they impose themselves? As was discussed with regards to the SoD, it is noticeable that the governors' role in such a key decision was reduced as a result of joining the trust. (Although no disappointment was expressed in the minutes.) The ability for the governors to challenge is undermined by their lack of understanding. The documents which contain such information can be obtuse; (the scheme of delegation I inherited in my current role runs to nearly 18,000 words). The complexity is a controlling measure on governing boards.

Tension 2: Financial constraints (post 2008 financial crisis)

There are numerous references to the financial pressures on the school, both before and after conversion. Governors were aware of the wider political picture: For example, in one minute, it was predicted that after an upcoming general election there would be a cut in education funding. This was clearly a concern to governors who had struggled to balance the budget throughout the time the minutes covered. Governors looked at the prospect pragmatically, rather than passing comment on whether they agreed with government policy or resisting the financial imperative to change. Finance was a key area of focus when considering joining a MAT. In a meeting attended by the MAT CEO before conversion and while the school was still considering its options, the CEO explained how the MAT could help the school financially. For example, by negotiating contracts on behalf of the school e.g. catering, grounds maintenance and IT and in doing so achieve discounts as a result of buying en masse for numerous schools. The financial pressure on the school appeared to have encouraged the governors to view financial efficiencies as important.

By far the biggest expense for the school was staff wages. With the financial constraints being experienced, the cost of staffing was an area of focus. There were numerous references to staff restructures in the minutes. A key consideration with academisation was the MAT's ability to

support any restructuring process. Both the school and the MAT agreed that there was a need to restructure and governors welcomed the support from the MAT and looked at them to lead in this area, rather than completing a restructure before they joined. Once joined, the MAT proposed making two members of staff redundant at the school as well as some changes to the leadership structure in order to reduce costs and balance the budget. Here Foucault's 'regime of truth' lies more in the school system's general neoliberal traits, rather than within the academy trust sector. Academisation was not the catalyst for the restructure – there had thoughts of this for some time. Financial pressures were clear from the minutes ("governors acknowledge that the current staff structure was not sustainable"), but the governors saw the MAT as being the best people to implement the restructure. Here there appears to be a motivation for giving autonomy away as the difficult business of a significant staff restructuring was not something the governors wanted to take on, nor did they trust the LA to lead on it. (This can be seen from numerous mentions of the MATs human resources staff in minutes of meetings, a part of the MAT which was seen as a strength.)

Once converted, a minute records governors asking how the MAT intends to improve the financial situation. No-one from the MAT was there to respond to the question and so a response was offered from the headteacher which alluded to the staff restructure. This exchange demonstrates a confusing set of accountabilities: The local governing body are seeking to hold the MAT to account for promises made before the conversion with the headteacher speaking on behalf of the MAT. The reality is there is no accountability mechanism in MATs' structure whereby the local can hold the central to account. This is consistent with the neoliberal system - Marshall argues that neoliberalism has no internal spaces within which to contest values (1995). My research focuses on the decision being made by governing boards to give power to MATs leaving them operating in a more neoliberal context where they have very limited options for contesting power. Fitzsimmons uses Foucault as a foundation for the argument that through self-constitution, people are implicated in their own governance (2002). In this example from the minutes the headteacher is defending a position which is not theirs and what is more, a decision which was only possible after governors made the decision to academise. Nevertheless, the headteacher felt compelled to defend the view.

Foucault's work can be argued as following the transition from the monarchs of the 17th century being the primary actors in government to the present day where individuals play the key role (Ball, 2013). For the headteacher to be defending the MAT, the process of normalisation of the actor is an obvious reference point from Foucault. Through this process, the headteacher is supporting the MAT's system. This is not to say the headteacher is powerless. There are other interpretations of Foucault's ideas as having two alternative conclusions: Ball uses Foucault to explore the "possibilities and impossibilities of transgression" (2013:152). In this case study, the governors were showing some willingness to explore resistance and challenge, albeit it was not sustained in future meetings.

Tension 3: The decline in the role of local authorities

Despite my literature review and personal experience identifying the declining role of the LA as being a potential tension, only one reference was made to the LA: Some aspects of services from the MAT were seen as an improvement on previous providers from the LA. In one meeting a copy a MAT ICT audit was shared. The headteacher stated that the process had been a positive one and had resulted in some very helpful and professional advice. This was in contrast to what had been offered by the LA previously. It is alluded to, although not specifically stated, that the human resources support from the MAT was an improvement on what had previously been accessed through the LA. An important point to note, is that the first case study was the first to join a MAT and therefore the first to leave LA control. It may be that the decline in the LA is felt more by schools which joined MATs later.

Emerging codes from the data:

Autonomy

The school needed some investment in buildings – something difficult to achieve considering the aforementioned financial restrictions. After conversion, requests were made to the MAT. In one minute the headteacher detailed the works needed before confirming that all these items had been placed on a 'wish list' which will be considered by the MAT alongside similar requests from other

academies. In subsequent meetings further needs were identified, but the governors had to refer to the MAT's Capital Expenditure Policy to see if they could make further requests from the MAT. (It later emerged that they could not – requests had to be made in an annual meeting.)

A further example of the lack of authority the governing board had post conversion was in grounds maintenance. In one meeting, a quote for a maintenance contract was agreed by governors before it was noted that decisions on contracts of a certain amount should not be bought to the governing body for approval. It was recognised that under the MAT policy all such contracts must be approved by the MAT board of directors. This reiterates an earlier point about governors not being sure of their role and sometimes carrying out duties that were not theirs. It is also useful here to draw on Foucault's concept of "homo economicus" the subjects constructed by neoliberalism who are focused on economic optimisation and maximisation (Foucault, 2008). In this specific example from the case study, the autonomy the school was used to, was considered as possibly leading to inefficiencies. Consequently, the MAT had rules which dictated when central approval was needed. The more expensive the purchase, the less likely local governors would have autonomy.

Performativity

Governors were keen to view and judge the school through a performative lens: Although initially unclear as to their role in the performance management of the headteacher, in time, governors felt that the MAT helped them to hold the headteacher to account. An example of this was the use of a "school improvement expert" who advised the school on improvements and was part of the performance management of the headteacher. One governor involved in the process explained that they had been very impressed with him during the meeting as he was well prepared and it was "a very professional meeting". The implication here is that a school improvement expert, because of his background is more able to hold the headteacher to account (as is expected in the neoliberal regime) than lay governors. The label of professional gave him legitimacy in the eyes of the governors. Here we see performativity having a profound impact on the roles of governors: They willingly welcome a reduction in their role in order to see the headteacher be held more to account.

Negative consequences of joining a MAT

The sharing of information was sometimes a problem. A governor reported that the MAT had requested a large amount of detailed financial information that the school did not have access to. A subsequent action was for a governor to contact the MAT to discuss the information required. There was sometimes a slowness in receiving information from the MAT. In one case the local governors were due to review the admissions policy which was being written by the MAT (previously the responsibility of the LA), but the minutes show the document had not been received yet. This creates an impression of the power dynamic between school and MAT as being one-way. As there is no overall objection to this recorded in the minutes, there is the suggestion of compliance and docility on the part of governors, again raising the idea of people being complicit in the neoliberal approach.

There was concern over the time needed from school staff to support the conversion process. Staff support had not been made readily available by the MAT to support the school's finance department during the conversion. There are consequences for the neoliberalism here; the bureaucratic nature of conversion (itself a symptom of neoliberalism) may be acting as a deterrent to convert.

A governor expressed concern over how slowly the MAT had reacted to certain needs of the academy in the past and was concerned there wouldn't be prompt action with regards to appointing a new headteacher, although in time this process was considered to have gone well.

Positive consequences of joining a MAT

Staff recruitment, partly due to budget issues and partly due to size and location of the school had meant that the headteacher explained to governors that the school was now utilising a caretaker from another school in the MAT for maintenance around the school and that this arrangement was working well.

With regards to the appointment of a new headteacher, the new headteacher's role was expected to be different to the departing incumbent, who stated that the MAT was proving to be very supportive in "re-defining" the role and identifying her replacement. The previous headteacher was recorded as teaching in class regularly, but there was an acknowledgement in the minutes that the new headteacher should do this less as the role of the headteacher was so demanding:

> "Governors discussed the role as it currently stands and it was suggested that the role of a teaching headteacher is no longer tenable and that a new approach needs to be identified."

This appears to be a reference to the audit and performative aspects of the role, e.g. ensuring compliance with requirements, preparing for OFSTED inspections, etc. These were being prioritised over the teaching part of the role. This is an example of performativity being valued over teaching. In another minute, a governor reported that the response from the MAT with regards to the vacancy, had been timely and positive and assured the rest of the board that the recruitment process was in good hands. It is possible to view this as an example of governing boards being put under pressure. Appointing a headteacher is a considerable responsibility which would have once been supported by the LA, but with budgetary cuts this is no longer the case. Left without such support, governors welcome help from MATs.

Case Study 2

The school in Case Study 2 is a primary sector school of average size in relatively advantaged area. It joined a MAT in the mid to latter years of the last decade. Like Case Study School 1, the meetings the minutes cover a period of roughly three years, with around a year and a half before and after conversion. Thirty meetings were covered by the minutes. The school was rated 'good' by OFSTED although there had been some serious historic issues with previous leadership of the school. A reoccurrence of these issues was a concern for some of the longer serving governors.

Tension 1: Neoliberal influences on school governance

In one meeting governors discussed the fact that they needed a new parent governor as there was a vacancy. They were aware that they should be mindful of skills and experience when considering the new person. Following a skills audit, it was pointed out by the clerk to the board that financial skills were lacking among governors already appointed. The meeting was informed that there were four prospective candidates and the board were interested if any of the parents had the required skills. There appears at this point to be an awkward clash of approaches to governor recruitment; parent governors are typically elected, but the DfE's Governor Competency Framework and the expected skills audits focuses on the need of certain professional skills.

The skillset approach appears to be hard-wired into governors' minds, or to borrow from Fairlough, the contentious had become common sense (1996). One of the questions asked before the school joined the MAT was how the trust's directors were appointed. The answer was by skills, as is the case on the school's board. It is interesting to note here that most MATs have no semblance of democratic representation on their board. This means that the aforementioned conflict referred to with this board is not an issue at MAT board level.

While there was some awareness and concern about the difference in governance structure and the way this would reduce the role of local governors, the board weighed this up against concerns of a repeat of a historical problem with the school's governance. A previous chair of governors had been thought to have had too much control over the school and had allowed the headteacher of the time

to make some poor decisions. This was at the forefront of some of the more experienced governors' minds as they had been at the school at the time. For them, they saw a benefit in the local leadership of the school having less power. "Governors were mindful of the need to ensure the schools *remains* in its *current* robust position" is recorded in one minute (italics added). The central executive and non-executive were seen as a check on local power. The risk of the central leadership of the trust having unbridled power wasn't considered.

Tension 2: Financial constraints (post 2008 financial crisis)

When meeting the governors prior to conversion, the MAT CEO explained that the change in finance was immediate upon conversion and was probably the area with the greatest impact. The requirements of the Academies Financial Handbook were explained and governors appear to be reassured by the extensive requirements. Although the school was in a relatively strong financial position, minutes attest to a worsening picture and this meant finance was at the fore of governor thoughts.

Autonomy was a big consideration for the governors. Before conversion, the school considered carefully the loss of control of the school's finances. At one meeting, attended by the MAT CEO, it was explained that all money in the MAT's schools belonged to the Trust and this helped to support other schools who might be struggling financially. As the case study school had healthy reserves they were concerned that what was currently "their" money, would be given to other schools. A minute acknowledged concerns from some governors that "the school's surplus could be used by other schools". This loss of control appeared to leave the governors conflicted; they could see the benefits of being part of something bigger, particularly if their school needed financial support. The idea of being the provider of support was less appealing. Here there appears to be a balancing of self-interest against stability of being part of a trust. A governor felt that the MAT's academies stood and fell together and wanted to know if any one academy could pull the others down. A governor was concerned that the school could be spending money to support other schools when the money might be needed in their own school. In such a scenario the benefit to the school in need of money is clear, as is the benefit to the MAT. Foucault wrote that the job of the manager is "to produce bodies that are docile and capable" (Foucault, 1979:294). MATs have created a new level of

management sitting above the previously more autonomous schools. CEOs and non-executive are the new managers and, in this example, while there is a need to find willing schools which are agreeable to sharing financial resources, there is also the option of simply encouraging a school to join the MAT at which point they no longer have the option to say no. The minutes show governors are aware of this crucial decision. After conversion there were times when a lack of decision making power, with regards to spending money, was felt by governors. In one meeting, the board noted that £40,000 had been spent on building maintenance in the year before conversion, but only £10,000 was budgeted for the each of the coming years and this caused concern.

Tension 3: The decline in the role of local authorities

The governors of the school were attracted to the centrally run services by the trust. They considered these as likely improvements on what the LA provided the school. One governor felt there were more advantages and economies of scale in joining a larger MAT because of the services they offer. A central part of the judgement made as to the effectiveness, or even the usefulness of the LA related to the services offered. The influence of neoliberalism appeared to influence governors as seeing the LA as a service provider, rather than a democratically accountable institution. The governors' attitude was that if the LA offered poor human resources support, they could be replaced with a MAT with a better offer. This is a clear example of a market orientated perspective.

Emerging codes from the data:

Positive consequences of joining a MAT

A positive aspect of conversion was the extensive range of school improvement support. There were numerous appreciative references to this in the minutes, although in one minute governors recorded a feeling that the school improvement support they were receiving from the MAT had lessened in quality since when they first joined. This suggests that the lens through which governors are judging the MAT is a performative one, even though they have no recourse through which to hold the MAT accountable, unlike parents who have the rights of a consumer and are able to take their child from one school to another. There is the possibility here that there is a superficial approach to school improvement from the MAT; once the school has joined there is no need to fulfil

the promises made before conversion. This itself is a feature of performativity; school improvement has no inherent value itself, beyond perhaps making pupils economically useful, it is simply a means to an end, be it to convince a school to join a MAT or to get a positive OFSTED report. Performativity raises the question what is of value. As Ball asks "who is it that determines what is to count as a valuable, effective or satisfactory performance and what measures or indicators are considered valid?" (2003:216). The headteacher explained that the MAT's position in this particular case was that they felt that there had been improvements and so there wasn't the need for the same amount of support as there once was. This links with Lyotard's notion of performativity being focused on inputs and outputs (1984). Once the input has achieved a certain output, further inputs can be focused on other areas, in this case, other schools within the MAT. An 'excess' input of resources is to be frowned upon as inefficient.

Negative consequences of joining a MAT

There were a number of references to the MAT not always responding to communications from the school. In one example a member of staff had resigned and the school sought support from the MAT and were disappointed that there had not been a reply to the request. (It should be said that the MAT did not have the responsibility for replacing this staff member, so part of the issue appeared to be confusion about where responsibilities lies.)

Political climate

Governors were aware of the prevailing political climate. In two minutes it was noted that the government was keen on schools becoming academies and one of these elaborated further by stating that schools were no longer being encouraged to be standalone academies. They understood that the government were keen on academies and this encouraged them to consider joining a trust. This approach did not appear to be out of political respect for the government – there are some minutes which were critical of the government's approach to education – but instead there is a pragmatic acceptance of policy. If the government is keen for schools to join MATs, then it was thought that it might be advantageous to do so. However, in one meeting worries were shared that future elections may bring a change in policy.

The neoliberal trait of performativity was at the fore of the governors' weighing up of MAT options. In the earlier stages, governors looked at the performance of different MATs, mainly through the OFSTED inspections of schools already in the trust. It is clear that the main measure of a successful school was seen as a school which had performed well in an OFSTED inspection – alternative narratives were not considered. When the MAT which the school eventually joined sent their CEO to speak to governors he described in detail the success schools in the trust had had in OFSTED inspections. There is a link here with Bourdieu's work on field and the associated concepts of habitus and capital. For Bourdieu, a field is a particular social space that has rules like a game and where people are like contestants in competition (1984). Bathmaker uses Bourdieu's concept of field to analyse participation in higher education. The 'rules of the game' shape the experience of students moving into and through different higher education routes. The research suggests that rules created for the selective part of the higher education field can have negative consequences on the non-selective parts of the field and in doing so create barriers for some pupils (2014). There was a similar case here where the case study school, operating within the rules of the field (i.e. neoliberal principles of an education market place) are trying to gain an advantage over other schools. It was noted that the MAT's schools had been successful in OFSTED and that a positive OFSTED result was crucial in ensuring parents chose the school for their child: The CEO described the MAT's record of OFSTED inspections and how 'mock inspections' would also be carried out if the school joined the MAT. These were described as "collaborative projects with the school" which "helped to maintain a picture of performance". Governors viewed such an approach positively, seemingly appreciating the support the MAT were offering in 'playing the game'.

Possible academisation influencing decisions

There was one instance where the governors' decisions were seemingly influenced by potential academisation. This means that before the school became an academy, they made a decision with one eye on becoming an academy. This related to staffing. Although the school had significant cash reserves the staff structure was expensive and becoming more so. The school was particularly minded as to how this might look to a MAT carrying out due diligence on the school. This meant that the MAT was influencing the school's actions, before it had any formal power over it.

Case Study 3 (considering joining a MAT)

The school in Case Study 3 is a primary school in an urban area with relatively high levels of social and economic deprivation. The school's most recent OFSTED inspection resulted in a 'good' grade. This school was part of a soft-federation – a group of schools working together without any formal governance structure. In the minutes the headteacher described it as a "loose arrangement where each school maintains its autonomy within the partnership". Towards the end of the period covered by my research, the headteacher resigned leaving the governors to find a replacement. A final part of this school's context is that the school had been forced by the LA to change the number of pupils it admits, something the governors did not agree with, but, as a maintained school, they could not resist this development.

This is the only school in my research which had not yet become an academy. It is clear from the minutes that the school had been looking at its options with regards to academy conversion for some time, with the topic being a standing item on agendas. At one meeting a paper was tabled which looked at six different MATs and compared characteristics, such as their location, the number of schools and the similarities between the schools in each MAT and the case study school. The minutes begin to focus on discussions with one MAT in particular. This MAT was one of the closest to the school and had a working relationship already with the headteacher through a shared project. There had been some shared professional development activities and some use of the MAT's facilities. There had been no pressure from organisations such as the Regional School Commissioner to join a MAT.

Tension 1: Neoliberal influences on school governance

There are several references to the governing board not having a full complement of governors. Beyond the number of governors, there was a need to recruit particular skills. When one governor resigned their loss was felt particularly as they had finance experience. Skills audits were a regular feature of the board's work. This was usually driven by the clerk of the board. Clerks and other governor professionals, defined as "a person usually appointed by the board itself to steer, guide, influence and to shape how governing works" (Hill, 2021) are an emerging feature of the

educational governance landscape and as Hill's definition suggests, have an influential role over the board. The governance professional is an under researched feature of the educational landscape. The National Governance Association has written model role descriptions which includes the functions such as "keeping the board focused on its core strategic priorities" (NGA, 2020c). Such aspects of the role mean that the use of governance professionals may be another controlling influence on the work of governors limiting variation from the neoliberal norm, an extension of what Foucault describes as techniques used to make the actions of individuals a significant element for the state. (1982). Herein lies a contradiction: While there is the established trend of professionalising the role of governors and this is reinforced by the role of the governance professional, autonomy is seen as an integral part of professionalism (Bourke et al. 2013). Governors have historically been seen as a role carried out by lay people, but here we can see the lines being blurred not only by emphasis on governance being carried out by those with particular professional skills, but also by the influence of those whose professional skill is governance itself.

The lack of governors meant that at one point the committee structure was changed owing to there not being enough people on the board. As discussed in Chapter 4, this school is in a more disadvantaged area than the other case studies and therefore it is likely that there were fewer people with professional skills in the local area, making recruitment harder. In the stakeholder approach to governance, the bar for qualifying to be a governor, is relatively low, e.g. being a local resident, parent or staff member, but the data in Chapter 4 shows that all governors across three schools come from the top two professional classes.

Despite a lack of governors, it was felt that there were possibly too many parent governors. In one minute, it was acknowledged that the board was very "parent heavy" and "this has the potential to leave us [the board] exposed in terms of committee membership and having a good balance of views and opinions." The idea that the views of parents need to be countered with those of an alternative background appears to be a criticism of the stakeholder approach. The minute continued: "While we value the professionalism of our existing parent governors we feel that we need to look outside of the immediate school community to the wider community." It can be argued that parents are

being problematised as a result of the neoliberal lens through which good practice in governance is judged, i.e. the valuing of professional skills. It could be that parents were well placed to ensure a level of local, or downwards, accountability, however this is not seen as being as desirable as upwards accountability towards the government and agencies like OFSTED.

The MAT the school was keenest on joining discussed some aspects of a representative model in its governance and this appealed to the governors of the school. Two different groups, one made up of governors from each of its academies and one made up of headteachers, would meet monthly. However, it was also made clear that decision making rests with the board of directors. This mirrors the one directional power dynamic seen in the other case studies.

The board was active in its own professional development with governors frequently reporting back on training they had undertaken. There had also been a review of governance carried out by an external consultant. In the run up to an OFSTED inspection there was a lot of work undertaken to ensure that governors were prepared. There was clear commitment from the governors, but it also clear that much of this commitment was focused on the sort of work (reviewing the professional skills of governors and preparing for inspection) valued in a neoliberal context.

Tension 2: Financial constraints (post 2008 financial crisis)

In one meeting it was noted that schools were under increasing financial pressure and the case study school's future. i.e. it's financial sustainability, needed to be safeguarded. It was said that "academisation has the potential to make good savings", particularly through the potential for "operational areas to be centralised". Here strained finances are creating a need for efficiencies.

A particular issue relating to finance concerned the school's increasingly expensive teaching staff. In most schools it is common for teachers to be paid on a nationally-set scale, with most teachers being paid more every year or two. This is line with the nationally agreed School Teachers' Pay and Condition Document, although some MATs have used the freedom given to them to deviate from

this and introduce spot salaries where a teacher is paid a set amount with no further increases, other than those which are inflationary. The school had had teachers progress through the pay scales and this increased staffing costs and created a problem noted by the board. However, their experience was valued and the governors agreed that "we need to be in a strong position in the event of academisation in the future". In this respect there is a similarity with one example from Case Study School 2 – the governors were influenced by potential academisation and were keen that the school was in as good a state of health as possible so as to be attractive to a MAT. It is interesting how this example demonstrates conflicting approaches: Budgeting exercises reduce the value of teachers to a financial figure, but governors seek a broader appreciation that places value on their experience and effectiveness. This though was, at least to an extent, inspired by an assumption of what might impress a MAT. This suggests that the governors' broader appreciation and valuing of teachers was possibly influenced by the MAT who would soon (if they converted) formally be able to dictate what is valued.

Other finance issues related to a decline in pupil numbers and fewer children accessing paid services such as wrap around care and nursery sessions. Joining a MAT was not seen as an answer to these problems, but it was part of what governors recognised as the context of the school.

Tension 3: The decline in the role of local authorities

Continuing the theme of finance, the minutes suggested that governors' efforts to track finances were made harder by the role of the LA, who provided finance support to the school. There are regular references to inaccuracies in reports made to the school by the LA's finance team. In one example it is recorded that the final budget had come through from the LA only the day before the meeting, rather than a week in advance as expected. The carry-forward was more than originally thought and further inaccuracies were found, for instance, £31,000 had been allocated for the wrong financial year. In a subsequent meeting another mistake was identified: Staffing costs associated with Pupil Premium funding had been counted twice by the LA finance team. Governors found

not knowing how much money the school had was frustrating and this seemed to encourage them to become an academy as they thought a trust would give better information to the school. There was a clear sentiment that the school was not getting a good deal out of the service from the LA. Further minutes show the headteacher complained that on another occasion figures from the LA's finance team had been received late and that they were the last school in the area to receive them. In another minute the governors were not able to look at the figures they were interested in because the LA's IT system was incompatible with school's. The minutes show a clear frustration with the LA on the part of the governors. There appears to be anxiety caused by the pressure of external expectations on governing boards and a feeling that the LA were not helping the school to meet such expectations.

There was also some concern about human resources (HR) support from the LA. There were several issues where the headteacher reported to the governing board that she was disappointed with the HR support received. This was a paid for service, although as the employer, the LA were the obvious, and perhaps only, choice to provide this service. Governors were not in a position to offer support, this required professional expertise which was not held by any of the board. Governors discussed, and were receptive to, proposals from the MAT with regards to HR support. The MAT promised to provide telephone support that can be accessed at any time by the school. In addition, a senior HR manager will visit schools once per half-term in order to provide support and advice. The governors were also keen on other aspects of the 'offer' from the MAT: Support on finance and school improvement were pitched to the school and minutes show governors reacted positively towards what was promised. The possibility of sharing staff across schools in the MAT was also mooted and was seen as another positive aspect of joining the trust.

It is clear that in this school, as in the other case study schools, particularly Case Study 2, there was an attitude among governors of judging the LA by the services they offered and judging any potential MAT by whether they can offer an improvement. This mirrors the consumer/producer relationship embedded in neoliberalism, but the ease with which the consumer (the school) switches producer (LA or MAT) is not as straightforward as a neoliberal position with its focus on

deregulation (Steger, 2010), would want. Academisation is a significant change which takes considerable time. It also a change which cannot be reversed. It is perhaps telling of the pull of neoliberal ideology that such a complex relationship can still be seen through the consumer/producer lens.

The minutes give the impression of a sales pitch from the MAT and suggest a one-way transaction between MAT and school; i.e. the MAT trying to impress as a potential 'suitor'. However, some minutes also suggest that the school were equally keen to present themselves in a positive light. There are some references to the school needing to be "in shape" for potential academisation. At one point, when discussing school improvement, the chair of governors states that "we need to be in a strong position in the event of academisation in the future". Another discussion focused on the need to keep costs low in order to ensure the school's budget looked positive. There appeared to be a strong desire to make sure the school was an attractive proposition to potential MATs.

A regular feature in the minutes was the fact that school had been forced to change the number of pupils it admits. This had been insisted on by the LA and the school initially refused, however they found that as a maintained school they had to accept the LA's plan. The headteacher felt that school was not consulted properly and did not support the decision. This was constantly seen as a problem in the minutes. In terms of finance as well as teaching and learning it was seen as creating a number of problems that persisted five years after the decision was made. In one minute, a £57,000 deficit was projected as a result of the change in pupil numbers. Although the school had been unhappy with the LA's plan, they did negotiate some financial support. Although this does not appear to be equal to the liability caused, it does appear that the school did have some compensation for the forced change. It was evident that the governors resented the change foisted on them by the LA and the fact that they had no choice appeared to encourage them towards academising. There was no discussion of the fact that joining a trust would leave the school in a relationship where once again their autonomy could be limited.

Emerging codes from the data:

Political climate

One of the drivers for academisation in the minutes was the national political picture. In one discussion the chair of governors states that by doing nothing, there is a risk of forced academisation. A particular worry in this scenario was that the culture of the school risked being lost. In a meeting attended by representatives of the MAT, something akin to a sales pitch was made which focused on culture and identity of the case study school. The MAT was keen to stress that if it joined, the school would not lose its independent identity: "The MAT will respect the unique characteristics and identity of each school in the group. We are not aiming to create a set of clones." This was well received by the governors and went unchallenged. There was no reference in the minutes to any explicit threat to the school around academisation. The school's performance in OFSTED and test results was above the standard that would lead to forced academisation. In a governmentality regime, various public agencies mobilise create insecurity to normalise populations. In this case study this is seen through the anxiety caused by a small number of schools in different circumstances (e.g. 'failed' OFSTED inspections, or low test results). Although this was not applicable to this school, the possibility of it this being the case in the future appeared to be sufficient to create a reaction.

Data from governor interviews

The third part of data collection focused on interviews with governors (including headteachers). For each school I interviewed the headteacher, the chair of governors (both characterised as being experienced 'level 3' in figure 5.4) and one less senior governor (from 'level 1'). For the first case study I also interviewed a former governor who, unlike the other interviewees, had been there at the time of conversion.

As part of the semi-structured interviews six media stories were used as stimulus, two relating to each of the three identified tensions, one taking a view that the tension exists (position 1 on a Likert scale), the other the opposite (position 5 on the Likert scale). As all three of the tensions have been widely reported and discussed in the education sector, governors were asked to pick a point on the Likert scale which explained how much the tension was felt in their school.

Figure 6.2 explore governor responses to a Likert scale to the media story. The lower the number, the less the governor believes there is a tension that has been felt in their school. Each X denotes an answer from a governor.

Tension 1: Governance	1 *"Academies have more control over how they do things"*	2	3	4	*5 "Founders give up managing Greenwich free school, citing excessive burden on governors"*
Case Study 1		X	X	X	X
Case Study 2		X	X		X
Case Study 3		X	X	X	

Tension 2: Finance	1 *"Boris Johnson pledges £4.6bn per year extra for schools"*	2	3	4	*5 "St Helens schools in 'crisis' due to funding freezes"*
Case Study 1			X	X	XX
Case Study 2				X	XX
Case Study 3			X	X	X

Tension 3: The role of LAs	1 *"10 facts you need to know about academy schools"* (claiming that academisation will not cause an increase in the bureaucratic burden to a school)	2	3	4	*"Third of councils to run out of money for statutory services by 2022"*
Case Study 1		X		XX	X
Case Study 2			X	X	X
Case Study 3			X	X	X

Figure 6.2

Governors' positions being generally towards the right suggest that governors do recognise there are tensions. When tested against experience of governors, there was no correlation, either between those at the centre or those considered to be novices, and their views. I believe this part of my research is important because governors were keen on joining MATs despite the tensions. Some object to government backed ideas such as academisation, but here we see governors taking a position of protest; they were open to academisation and pragmatic about the challenges faced.

<u>Case Study 1</u>

Autonomy, and the loss of it, was a key theme that came out of the minutes and an objection raised in the literature review. Interviews revealed there to be complex relationships between the school, the local governing board and the MAT. Over time this had changed. The former governor believed the school was afforded more say in decisions in the early days:

> "When we joined the MAT, we were expecting [from the MAT] 'this is how we want things done, this is how you're going to do it' but we still retained a lot of autonomy, and I think that was because when we joined the MAT, it was very young, and was trying to establish itself."

The maturity of the MAT may have been an influence here. In the literature review I reference Ladd and Fiske who state that the idea that executive leaders hold the autonomy in MATs is more likely to be true in MATs that have been established for longer, as they will often have a firmer leadership structure. The nature of my research shows that over time in the case study there was increasing prescription and the minutes show some discontent on the part of governors. It is possible that this the consequence of the gradual tightening of regulations seen in documents such as in the Academies Financial Handbook over time. As discussed in chapter 5, new versions of key texts create further prescription on schools and the MATs to which they belong. Where greater demands are made on MATs these are typically passed on as directives to schools. Such direction wasn't always seen as a negative. One governor said that the appointment of a new headteacher was the first time it was felt "that they [the MAT] were showing some muscle" and exerting control. However sometimes governors did want more freedom to make their own decisions. On this point the headteacher recognised the governors as having a view of the school's autonomy which wasn't quite in line with reality:

> "I think, speaking of the governors as a whole, they feel that they should be able to choose, for example, to spend some reserves on something. They should be able to choose around staffing, but that is constrained by the trust. I think sometimes they lose sight of the bigger picture. I think that actually some decisions are taken for the best for the school by the academy trust, whether the governors agree with that or not."

The theme of governors not having a realistic view of their role continued with the headteacher suggesting the notion of them wanting to 'have their cake and eat it':

> "I'd say they would like the autonomy to do what they would like to do, but they also like the reassurance financially that knowing that the multi-academy trust is there in the background."

It is worth noting here that this case study school's governing body had less governor experience than the other case studies (a mean of 3.1 years instead of 4 or 4.1 in other schools) and this may have led to unrealistic expectations. The former governor - who was interviewed as she was on the board at the time of conversion - had many years' experience of governing on local boards and

maintained schools as well as on a trust board. This is likely to explain her more pragmatic understanding of academy trusts. Referring to the decision making behind the conversion she said:

> "I think that there's definitely a distinction here from becoming a [single] academy, such as, let's say, a secondary school, becoming an academy and becoming more autonomous, as opposed to becoming a part of a multi academy trust where you know that you are going to give up some control. I would say we went into it with our eyes very wide open, and in many respects, it was a reaction to us understanding what the burden of us as governors was. And the fact that, you know, you're a bunch of volunteers who are not paid for what is essentially running a business."

Equally the headteacher of the school could be said, due to her professional role, that she was immersed in the 'common sense' of neoliberal approaches and therefore was able to critique, from her perspective, the views of governors as unrealistic. An important part of context here is that this headteacher had not been a headteacher in a maintained school. Consequently, the practices of a MAT were the norm for her. This raises an important point in that for the next generation of headteachers and governors they may well have had no experience of different (i.e. alternative to a MAT) ways of working. This would be the conclusion of the journey Fairclough describes when he writes about the politically contentious becoming "common sense". For headteachers who are relatively inexperienced, the normalisation of neoliberal activities is already the norm.

When the school needed a new headteacher the school found itself, possibly for the first time in its history, not being in charge of recruitment. However, the former governor welcomed the support from the MAT in this area, recognising the limitations of their own expertise:

> "I'd say it's very difficult, you know. If I recruit somebody in my line of work, I know what I'm looking for, um, you know, as a governor I'm not convinced you have an idea of what you're looking for but how you would be able to judge whether somebody is up to that, I don't know."

Note the governor referring to her professional experiences. This is what is valued in the neoliberal paradigm and her lack of professional familiarity with interviewing headteachers left her lacking in

confidence and welcoming the support of the executive central team of the MAT and consequently the reduction in her and other governors' roles.

There are echoes here with the analysis of the minutes where I commented on how governors welcomed the role of the MAT in the performance management of the headteacher. Headteacher performance management is among the most important and least understood aspects of school governance (Bubb et al. 2019). A classic definition of performance management is problematic in the context of governance: Castetter describes a process where the superior assesses and draws conclusions about the performance of the subordinate with the expectation that the process will lead to an improvement in performance (1992). In the context of education there is an obvious conflict here: The subordinate (headteacher) is the professional, the superior (governor) is the lay person (despite the focus on professional skills). A pro-academy sector report has suggested that there is a need for a change in governor's capacity to performance manage headteachers if they are to take on the expected leadership role and fulfil the legal requirements the system now expects of them (Academies Commission, 2013). The approach for maintained schools has been for governors to appoint an external and independent advisor (NGA, 2020b), however as already discussed, in MATs, the role of line managing is led more by CEOs than governors. This is a significant step in making not just headteachers, but governors themselves, what Foucault would call, governable subjects. The involvement of governors is reduced and professionals rule. We can see from the case study the governors actively welcome this:

> "I have felt more comfortable with the MAT leading [performance management] – they know their stuff. It's really helpful to have their expertise."

There was some evidence that governors also welcomed the intervention or support of the MAT (even, if again, there was a loss of autonomy) when it came to finance. As demonstrated in the minutes, this had been a major consideration of the board when considering joining a trust. There had been no silver bullet; academisation had not made the school better off financially, but the board felt more secure being part of a trust. The chair of governors said:

> "Even though there are reserves, you know, if the deficit carries on, ultimately, they will run out, but I think it's totally reassuring to know the academy trust is there.

It appeared that the school finances had created worry and concern among the governing board to the extent that the reassurance brought by being part of one organisation with technically pooled resources outweighed concerns about the loss of autonomy. It is worth noting that some of the more extreme financial freedoms given to MATs are not frequently taken. General Annual Grant (the main source of funding to academy schools) pooling is permitted by the Education and Skills Funding Agency. A MAT has the freedom to bring together a proportion of funding for all of its academies into one central fund. This fund can then be used to meet the running costs of any of the academies within the trust. Yet only around 5% of trusts have taken this route (Kreston 2019).

Beyond pooling of finances, in this case study, the headteacher welcomed being part of a bigger trust because this led to a bigger central team who were able to offer advice and support. This was appreciated, particularly during the coronavirus pandemic:

> "Somebody I know whose MAT, it's only got I think, two schools at the moment, I've had the emails from her saying what did you do about this and what are you doing about that? Because she just hasn't got that support from her MAT.

The pandemic also gave cause for the reflection on the role between the school and the LA. During the period the LA were given an elevated role, more so than the academy sector equivalent, Regional School Commissioners. This led to many academies having more contact with LA, something which some MATs resisted (Dewes, 2020). In the case of this school, their MAT was happy for them to engage with the LA, with the headteacher being allowed to collaborate with the LA:

> "We were very much given the direction to engage with the local authority if you wanted to, which everybody wanted to do, but there isn't anything they've offered that we haven't got from the Multi Academy Trust. I think it depends on the strength of the trust really. I certainly think what we're getting through the trust is far superior than what we would get through the LA."

A report by OFSTED on the coronavirus pandemic found that school leaders they had spoken to greatly valued the support of their MATs. MATs helped with risk assessments and sourcing protective equipment such as masks and this allowed school leaders to "focus on what is important"

and "get on with daily business of teaching and learning" (Muijs & Sampson, 2021). It is perhaps not a surprise that LAs were unable to provide such support given the changes in funding and the consequent reductions in staffing.

A governor in the case study school at the time of conversion reflected on the changing role of the LA in the period leading up to academisation:

> "I think it was becoming very hard to govern because of the lack of support from the LA, erm, because of the budget cuts that had happened there, so the whole…the number of people that you could tap in to help was contracting."

The need for efficient support services appeared to have been particularly keenly felt at this school because of its small size. The former governor referred to size of the school and the responsibility that came with governance as combining to make her experience "lonely". The size of the school also led to a more 'hands on' approach. Ordinarily governors are expected to be strategic, not operational, with the former being left to the headteacher and other staff:

> "Sometimes the lines were getting blurred. So that was another benefit of moving towards an academy trust…with a small school it's very difficult to not get operational because there's nobody there to do stuff. And you end up going to, you know, especially if things are falling to pieces, well that's probably the wrong phraseology but especially if, you know, if you've got a headteacher, who doesn't have peers to discuss issues with, who do they turn to? They turn to their governors, which isn't necessarily the right way to go, because, erm, I'm not convinced governors are necessarily qualified to advice a teacher on teaching. I think it's very lonely being a headteacher of a small school."

The burden generally on governance was acknowledged to be high. The current chair of g

overnors referred to the most recent member of the board to leave:

> "When our most recent governor left, she said, you know, it took a lot more time than she'd ever realised, even though we tried to tell her how much time it took."

It is noticeable that this was still happening after the school had joined a MAT. Despite the potential for sharing the governance load, this does not appear to have materialised in practice. However, this governor still saw being in a MAT as useful. She added that the expectations were such that "there is a huge responsibility on governance" before further commenting:

> "I can absolutely understand why governors would look towards moving to a MAT, certainly based on our experience trying to get governors as well as the burden of governing, because there aren't enough people around who care enough or have enough time to do it, or maybe that they get put off because of the level of responsibility that goes with it."

It is perhaps surprising that the governor still had such confidence in MATs alleviating the challenges of being a governor if one of her peers had left because of time pressures. I would suggest that the solutions to neoliberal tensions offered by neoliberalism do not actually have to reduce the tension, they simply need to create the need to change, in this case, for a school to join a MAT.

In this case study we see several examples of worry and concern being caused by the prevailing conditions. Finance, the burden placed on governors, the role of the LA and coronavirus all created some anxiety for governors. This chimes with the work of Ball who describes the effect of neoliberalism on the education sector:

> "We become ontologically insecure: Unsure whether we are doing enough, doing the right thing, doing as much as others, or as well as others, constantly looking to improve, to be better, to be excellent." (2003:220)

The insecurity felt has influenced governors and, on balance, they appear to have valued being part of the MAT. This leads me to challenge one word from Ball's quote: The governors are insecure within the neoliberal pressures they are under, but not in terms of the ontology itself. They have absorbed a neoliberal ontology and are accepting of the challenges and insecurity. The scrutiny and rigour of a neoliberal regime wasn't questioned, it perhaps almost valued. As the chair of governors said:

> "We're trying to do the best for the children, ultimately, that's what it all comes down to. That's why we need to be rigorous in our processes and look at how we can best provide a good standard of education, that's why we looked at joining [name of MAT]."

Here, the neoliberal pressures and anxiety are not to be argued with – they are to be worn like a badge of honour because the governors absorb the pressures for the benefit of the children. There is no challenging whether these pressures are in the interests of the children. To question the nuance of a previous Ball quote - "effectivity rather than honesty is most valued in a performative regime" (2003:226) - the governor's approach is honest despite the influence of performativity, but no alternative is visible. Foucault described how normalisation involved the construction of an idealised norm of conduct (1979) and here we have an example of how this process is complete with alternative approaches inconceivable.

Case Study 2

The theme of governor recruitment identified in the literature review was less prevalent in case study 2, than the other schools, but it was still an issue. Although at the point of interviewing the Chair of Governors felt they had a strong governing body ("at the moment we're quite lucky"), it was acknowledged that it wasn't always easy to cover all areas of professional expertise required:

> "Sometimes we struggle to get professional skills, for example, finance is usually quite tricky. I'm not sure if there is anything really that can be done about it."

However, governor recruitment was not seen as much as an issue in other schools. It was acknowledged that parents had usually been keen to become governors and the relatively affluent area the school is situated in meant that usually there were people with the 'right' professional skills:

> "It's lucky because it was quite a middle-class area where the parents were willing to get involved with the school. I don't think it was necessarily a struggle."

This strongly suggests a playing field which is far from level. Schools in areas with more professional skills are better able to recruit governors that meet the Governor Competency

Framework. The advantages given to affluent areas reflect the criticism of neoliberalism as favouring those in society with the highest income (Duménil & Lévy, 2011) or the capital class. As the case study school with the least issues in terms of recruiting professionals to the board is the school in the most affluent area, this is further evidence that the conditions in which schools govern favour the affluent. The third case study was in a more disadvantaged area and I will return to this theme in the next section. Regardless of the affluent area providing a steady stream of suitably skilled governors, the headteacher admitted that governance was a source of some worry. This was due to the significance of the role given to lay people. Despite the emphasis on governors needing professional skills, governors were still seen as volunteers who may not have the time to fulfil the role to the full extent:

> "Governance can be tricky. As a headteacher you feel that a lot of power is put in the hands of people who are trying really hard, but some do more than others and you know that means there's more pressure on those who have got the time to volunteer or step up to take on roles."

This is an interesting remark. The literature review focused on governors losing power when they join a MAT and the SoD this school worked under was no exception to the theme of power being held centrally, rather than with schools. Unlike the headteacher in the first case study, this head had experience of leading a maintained school. Perhaps, as was the case with the governors in Case Study 1, this headteacher had not quite grasped that the governors no longer had significant power and perhaps the governors too had not made the shift. It is possible that despite the SoD suggesting few powers lay locally, the performative pressures of the neoliberal school system still left governors feeling there was much work to be done and they were largely responsible for the performance of the school. A further level of interpretation is that the headteacher possibly felt uncomfortable working with governors who were not as immersed in the education world as she was and were therefore not as deeply influenced by 'common sense' or governmentality. This appears to have created some unease for the headteacher; the precarious nature of a headteacher's role in a highly accountable system leaves the head feeling vulnerable without the right support from governors. This chimes with Ball's idea of the "terror" of performativity in education (2001:143), but there is some nuance to note: Any terror felt by the headteacher is not with performativity itself, but with other's not being up to the challenge it brings and in doing so risking the headteacher/school's

success. Ball writes that "the new performative worker is a promiscuous self" (2003:2015). It might be unfair from this evidence to suggest that the headteacher is more concerned about judgments of their performance than the education of pupils in the school, but the conditions for such behaviour are prevalent. The theme of varying degrees of commitment among members of the same governing board to neoliberal ideas is something I will return to in the next case study.

As reflected in the literature review and in the other case study schools, finance was a worry. On the suggestion that academies get a better financial deal, the chair of governors noted that they "certainly haven't found that to be the case, but we weren't expecting it to be so". The school did not see itself in worse financial situation than other schools, but money was still a worry:

> "For me, the finances worry me they do. But that's not necessarily just because of us per se. It seems to be, you know, there's just not enough money to go around through the sector, just generally."

The headteacher spoke positively about the financial expertise at the trust ("we're fortunate that [name of Chief Finance Officer] knows her stuff"). She acknowledged that there was a loss of autonomy regarding financial discussions, but was not concerned about this:

> "You have to run past them [the MAT] what we spend money on, but so far this isn't a problem and we've always been on the same page when it comes to spending decisions."

There is a suggestion here that the trade-off for the loss of autonomy is the financial expertise of members of the trust executive. It appears that the recognition of the latter, undermines the value of the former; why would the school want to make their own decisions, if they recognise others know more? With the Chief Financial Officer spending their entire role focused on academy finances, it is perhaps inevitable that a headteacher and the governing board more widely would bow to their professional expertise, ahead of the local, soft, contextual knowledge of those working or governing at the school. This side-lining of local knowledge mirrors the trends identified in the literature review of less power being held locally in the MAT structure and also centrally set metrics influencing spending decisions (as in Integrated Curriculum Financial Planning).

The role of the LA in supporting the school before conversion was remembered well by those interviewed, although not usually positively. The headteacher's view was typical:

> "Sometimes I don't really think it's their fault you know - I know they haven't got the money that they once did and they don't have lots of people who can support schools. Having said that, there have been times when the LA haven't helped themselves. They have had lots of changes and staff and sometimes perhaps leadership hasn't quite been there."

There was a consensus over the quality of services received from the LA and the significance of this perception of quality went a long way to defining the relationship between the school and the LA. Services were said to be consistently below the standard expected and before conversion the school felt locked-in to the services. A governor said:

> "At the time we academised, I think it was at the time that the LA services were beginning to see the good people from LA moving out to the academy trusts. I don't know whether it was for more money but probably for more job satisfaction. So it felt very much like the people that were left in the council and services were probably not the best people that were left, that's probably been a little bit at the extreme because there are still some good people in the LA, but it felt very much like that as a small school we weren't getting the kind of service needed."

The MAT was seen as an improvement by the chair of governors. What Wilkins refers to as a repoliticisation (removal from the constraints of the LA to the constraints of a MAT, 2016a) had been successful because the LA were judged as a service provider rather than their historic role of helping to provide "agreed collective public and civil values" (Arthur, 2015:311):

> "Moving to the MAT definitely solved a lot of the issues around HR, finance, you know the general day-to-day running of the school. You know, it's always hard when you move, and change can be difficult for people but ultimately, you know, a while on from becoming an academy and joining the multi academy trust things are settled down, new systems were embedded, you were getting the support that you needed and, you know, it was running a hell of a lot smoother."

The headteacher concurred with this view, but the less experienced (in role for less than two years) governor had a less clear conclusion:

> "I don't know if the services from the MAT are any better really. I don't see what they do up close, my role just doesn't include that sort of stuff. I know people who have been a governor longer don't think the LA was very good at that sort of thing. I wasn't a governor back then, but I never noticed a problem as a parent. People like [names of more senior governors] would know better than I would though."

The less experienced governor appears to have a feeling that they have not seen the whole picture, partly because they have not been doing the role as long and partly because their lack of seniority means they don't work as closely with the school – for example they don't chair the board or any of its committees. It is interesting that this is a view held by the less senior governor themselves; it would appear that there may be something culturally within the governing body, or perhaps education more generally, which reduces the newer governors' confidence in their own ability.

A market-based attitude was central to the school's ideas about services. Post-conversion the school was happy adopting a selective approach to the services brought from the LA. The chair of governors said:

> "We cherry picked the services that we felt were good, and then we cherry picked and went and used some of the LA services as well, because they were better at certain things. It was definitely more of a market approach."

Coronavirus did give an opportunity for the LA to be seen in a more positive light. The headteacher appreciated some of the information sharing during the pandemic:

> "They have been there throughout…there has been a regular updates and they have joined up well with Public Health, so it's been easier to keep up to date with guidance as it changes."

This perhaps reflects the aforementioned greater role given to LAs during the pandemic, a change from the trend of the preceding thirty years (Dewes, 2020). Given a greater role, arguably the LA was able to be more useful to schools. Rayner suggests that the Foucauldian theory of governmentality is less predictable when unanticipated events can derail the expected influence of governmentality (2017). Certainly the pandemic was a significant and unexpected event and in this

case study it gave the LA to make a positive impression and reminded the school of its values beyond that of offered traded services.

Case Study 3 (considering joining a MAT)

As discussed in the literature review, governor recruitment can be challenge. Case Study 3 had the most deprived cohort and added to the previous case studies we can see that the location of the school - in a relatively deprived area – influenced how difficult it was to find governors with the appropriate skills. The headteacher said the context of the school had made governance harder:

> "Governance is a challenge. And in a setting like this, it is definitely more of a challenge; the creating and finding governors, even governors in the parent community is difficult. It's difficult to find those individuals with the time and the skills and potentially the previous experiences that would lead them to feel confident enough to do it. I think one of the hardest things here has, yes, been getting people physically here, but actually it's been about growing capacity. If your school is small like ours and individuals have therefore got lots and lots of things that they're responsible for, and obviously governors have most likely a day job. And of the things that they're responsible for, finding time to grow their knowledge and skill is really difficult.

Two characteristics of the school appear to be significant here: "A setting like this" refers to the aforementioned disadvantaged community which the school serves and there is also a reference to the small size of the school (although it was bigger than the school in Case Study 1). It was hoped by the headteacher that joining a MAT would help:

> "And I think that in a multi academy trust, there is a chance potentially to have a wide circle of individuals that can buddy or help each other and pair up. And I think that is potentially a motive for change. I think. Yeah, I think for me that would be the one thing that I'd be interested in finding out."

When asked whether this reason was sufficient to join a MAT, the headteacher wasn't convinced. The issue about lack of capacity on the governing board was actually a stumbling block in conversion due to the efforts needed to complete the process:

> "I think such a transition process and the things that a governing body would have to go through would be quite overwhelming. That's what I've certainly found frustrating here. We've been having the conversation about converting for a really long time, but not actually doing anything."

This raises the point about neoliberalism not always being efficient meaning Foucault's "convenient end" (2009:482) is not always reached, or if it is, progress may be slower. The literature review showed two possible reasons for this (Rayner's unexpected events and Stenson's local variation, pg. 29-30), but here we have something that is neither unexpected or due to local issues. Instead we have an incoherence to neoliberal forces: A focus on a skillset approach to governance and performative pressures leads to fewer governors in place to engage with the complex bureaucracy involved in academisation. The Chair of Governors concurred that the capacity of the board was limited:

> "Not everyone's got enough time to delve into it [academisation], unlike some of us who force ourselves to."

This quote reinforces my earlier argument concerning the different levels of knowledge and experience of governors influencing their role in the decision-making process (chapter 5). Before I argued that the more experienced governors are more likely to be influenced by neoliberal beliefs and that less experienced governors' voices may be less valued. Here there is a subtle variation on the idea of the length of time governing, influences thinking. Here it is to do with the amount of time a governor commits to finding out about issues around academisation. This leaves room for the argument that dissenting voices simply haven't spent enough time trying to understand the reasons for joining a MAT, or alternatively if you disagree it is not the idea you are disagreeing with which is at fault, it is your lack of understanding. There is the potential for the less experienced governor to find the voice diminished compared with those who are considered to have invested more time to grasp the detail of the issue of academisation.

A significant driver in the school's interest in joining a trust was the relationship with the LA. There were two issues raised in both minutes of meeting and interviews. Firstly, there was unanimous dissatisfaction with the LA services. For the Chair of Governors this provided a reason to pursue academisation, simply because "the [LA] service is pretty poor". There was a feeling that as a maintained school, they had no choice but to use the LA services:

> "I think the thing is I can influence is what our school does and therefore educate our kids through the choices that we're making, but with the LA providing our services, we can't actually influence any of that because there is no market."

Lissovoy argues that those in education fail to see the operation of ideology in the day-to-day activities of schools. Neoliberalism has undertaken the "subsumption of the totality of culture and experience into the logic of the market…no alternative to the current organisation of society and education is possible or imaginable" (2013:423-4). With the neoliberal viewpoint dominating, it is perhaps no surprise that there was a view that in a MAT there would be more choice over services (an idea at odds with the theory of a MAT leading to less autonomy):

> "[If joining a MAT] we'll actually be paying for what we need [in terms of services] rather than what we don't need and what we don't get."

Here is an example of an institution (the LA), that predates neoliberalism's journey to becoming the dominant force in politics, being judged against neoliberal standards. This echoes Crouch's view that neoliberalism criticises aspects of public policy and then provides an alternative approach, or solution to the 'problem' (2011). This phenomenon seemed to apply here as the Chair was clearly a believer, at least theoretically, in the role of LAs:

> "My principles tell me that actually we should be maintained by the local authority. By and large, being part of a good local authority is actually a really good thing…but unfortunately, political decisions and austerity, etc… They [the LA] have been forced into a very, very difficult position."

This governor was clearly taking a pragmatic approach, putting the realities of the neoliberal system above personal political views. There was clear dissatisfaction at the wider political and educational landscape and a wariness of business influences:

> "I think the monetisation of education in the UK is wrong. I think that it will lead to a two tiered system of education and I think there's real risk when you've not necessarily got educators and education professionals running schools."

This view is perhaps at odds with the previous desire for a market approach to services:

> "We've had 10 years of austerity and all government services have been cut to a greater or lesser degree. Schools have had budgets frozen for a period of time. From my perspective, as chair I have to be aware of the political landscape that we're operating in. It's what anybody would do if you had a business or anything else. You need to understand what the market is and what the market forces are telling you and if your biggest funder, which is the government, is saying, you know, we're going to be cutting - we've cut everything else, you have to be aware and react to that. So parts of the move and focus on academisation was looking to protect us."

The headteacher also realised the limitations of the LA in the current climate:

> "One of the things that attracted me to moving to a Multi Academy Trust, not just personally but for the school, is the fact that you become part of a really large organisation community and that can be helpful. With the local authority to have that sense of family is tricky because it's so big. Yet in terms of staff the local authority has been decreasing in size."

The second issue with the school's relationship with the LA was that the school had had the number of pupils on roll changed temporarily, despite the school not wanting the change. The chair of governors was very disappointed that such a course of action had been taken:

> "It feels like it was dumped on the school. They [the LA] had got particular needs that other schools can't meet and we can't meet at all, but they've left it to us to deal with it. It's a very difficult thing because no one wins, least of all the children."

There had been a significant financial impact due to staffing changes:

> "We bought in extra staff and they will need to make them redundant possibly [when numbers revert to normal] and that will cost us. Even if we get to a point where we feel like we're managing our budget well, trying to have a sustainable budget, is always going

be a challenge and potentially have an impact. There are ways to take some good background services. If you don't have money and you can't get your money working, you can't deliver anything you supposed to deliver in terms of children and education outcomes. So for me, money is probably the biggest motivator for change."

This situation turns a regular argument about academies (academise and you lose autonomy) on its head. In this case the school was maintained by the LA and had been forced into a particular action. The headteacher had considered carefully the issue of autonomy is this situation and whether, because of the LA's actions, they should become an academy:

> "Is it that we need to convert because we need to leave the local authority? Not necessarily. I think that the grass isn't always greener on the other side. So I think the local authority, on the whole, does actually serve us quite well. Take the changing of the PAN [Published Admission Number – the number of children the school can take]. It was a fiasco because of how it how it came to be. But once it came to be, the local authority actually did step up. They gave us significantly more money than any other school would have got. Then they took the time to listen and take into account some of the challenges that we were facing. I'm not completely sure a Multi Academy Trust would do that. I think they would potentially be much more authoritative about it."

The headteacher mused on whether the democratic accountability the LA was subject to meant they would listen more to a school than a MAT:

> "These people, the CEOs, the big wigs [in MATs], they're quite strong in terms of their political viewpoints and public stances. I think the local authority want to keep the peace. They want to try to mediate where they can. It's different, isn't it?"

The headteacher had an interesting perspective as a few months after interview she was due to become a headteacher in another school, one that was part of a MAT. She had considered the possible loss of autonomy in moving to a trust and related to it the change of governing board might experience if their school were to convert:

> "I think it could potentially be a deterrent. I certainly asked those kinds of challenging conversations to [name of new employer] and said things like being a head teacher at my

> current school, to joining a MAT, is that not technically a demotion? And so we had conversations around that. And I think potentially a governing body might feel like that. However, I don't have any experience of governing bodies who want the power of being responsible in the same way as head teachers or senior leaders would want it. I can't imagine that a governing body wouldn't want to have that support [of a MAT]."

Here there is a divide between the professional (headteacher) and the lay, governors. Even if the latter had been subject to a process of professionalisation (as discussed in the literature review and my data) this was not sufficient to bridge the gap between the two sets of views. There may have been a feeling that there was more accountability in a MAT, but the headteacher did not necessarily view this as a bad thing:

> "It's hard to know, I've only a small amount of experience [of academies] I do get a real sense that there is more holding to account. And there's two reasons I think that's really important. On the one hand, nobody holds [name of school's] governing body to account. Nobody holds the chair to account. I found it difficult to be the head teacher of a governing body that doesn't always consistently do as it should. So which one would I pick? I'd probably pick being in a Multi Academy Trust because I think it is less terrifying in some way. Yeah. I think I'd really like to be just told what to do…here [name of school] I have spent a lot of time talking, collaborating and consulting…You can feel really alone.

Bubb et al. (2019) find that headteachers were more likely to have concerns with performance management in their school than governors. The same research offered further evidence of performativity values being the norm when it found data and evidence to be key components of effective performance management. Here we see such values being held by the headteacher and this leading to similar expectations for governors.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

For the final chapter I draw on the data in the data analysis in chapters 5 and 6 to answer my two research questions:

- What are the neoliberal tensions in the academisation of schools?
- What are the factors influencing the decisions of individual schools when considering joining a multi academy trust?

To answer these questions, I outline the influence of different tensions, starting with the three that were pre-determined before research began. I then take key additional themes which emerged during data analysis and make conclusions on the controlling power of neoliberalism. In all, I outline a powerful set of influences on governing boards making decisions about joining MATs. However, I also conclude that there are examples where neoliberalism works against itself to deny the reaching of Foucault's "convenient end" (2009:482). As well as making conclusions in this chapter based on my research, I also extrapolate these to speculate whether the influences felt by governing boards are likely to continue to encourage other schools to join MATs in the future.

<u>Neoliberal influences on school governance</u>

Given the Scheme of Delegations that I reviewed suggested that the case study schools have seen a reduction in the role of their local governors, it is intuitive to expect that governing has become a less pressurised role. This was not generally borne out in the data, for instance, in Case Study 1 a governor had recently left because of the time commitment needed. All schools had at least some concern for the sustainability of governance and finding willing people with appropriate skills. It should also be pointed out that although the governor role may have been reduced, the expectations for the professional expertise of governors had probably been raised.

The transition of governors from their democratic roots and stakeholder representation to a form of neoliberal professionalisation is a recurring theme throughout the data. This transition is only partially complete and this creates implications for neoliberalism. Despite skills audits being routinely used and all three governing boards being committed to recruiting governors to fill any perceived gaps in the board's expertise, more governors reported their reason for appointment

being connected to some sort of stakeholder representation, rather than being due to their skills. For example, in Case Study 2, there was an awkward clash of approaches to governor recruitment; parent governors were elected, but the DfE's Governor Competency Framework and skills audits focuses on the need for certain professional skills. Which approach should drive appointments to the board? In reality there was often not a choice, as it was difficult to find sufficient governors with the expected skills. Case Study 3 struggled to find professionals in their disadvantaged community, while a governor in Case Study 2 acknowledged that their relatively affluent context gave an advantage. A significant proportion of governors in the case study schools lived in the community of their schools and were (or had previously been) parents, or they were members of staff. This leaves a hybrid approach which is not yet a complete version of the neoliberal ideal. Wilkins' idea of a democracy "reserved for the skilled and committed" (2016a:147) captures a sense of a third way between two extremes. I would suggest a variation on Wilkins' perspective, where democracy exists, but is minimised, with some more able to access it than others. The case studies have a neoliberal approach with traces of democratic accountability. Are these historic traces which will fade with time? The chronology of the case studies academisation does not offer sufficient evidence of this. It will be interesting to see if this becomes less of a feature in the future and whether future studies show that neoliberalism/academisation has eroded democratic values in educational governance.

The movement of power from the local to the central connects to a different sort of professionalisation of governors; not that governors become more professional, but they are replaced by professionals (such as CEOs) or by a smaller number of skilled directors, 'uber governors', such as a few from the case studies who have governed in numerous settings and who meet the high expectations for professional skillsets. The reduction in the number of governors serving on the local board in one case study provides further evidence of a more concentrated model of control.

A conflicting approach to governance was seen in two of the governors surveyed wanting to 'make a difference'. This altruism is locally focused; governors with an affinity or connection with a school want to help it to do well. A variation on this theme, are governors who are motivated by more of an activist altruism - two governors mentioned how they were concerned with the direction the school was taking and this inspired them to become governors. Although slightly different, both

types of governors are very much focused on the local setting. Such attitudes are not necessarily synchronised with neoliberal approaches to governance. The academy governance model has an in-built check to guard against such motivations; with few decisions being made at local level, there is less room for those who feel passionately about a particular school. Even at local level there is wariness of parents. There were several instances where the case study boards were cautious of having too many parent governors, although this was sometimes offset by the general challenge of finding enough governors. Consequently, parent governors were sometimes re-categorised as a different sort of governor, despite the fact that they presumably retained the view point of a parent. Here neoliberalism is failing to achieve its aims.

Governors were generally very focused on the topic of autonomy. They were aware that joining a MAT would mean they would not have so much decision-making power, yet autonomy is one of the tropes of neoliberalism and the academies programme (Rudd & Goodson, 2017). A term after I become CEO of an academy trust, a new school joined the MAT. The DfE sent the school a 'pre-opening letter' where the school was congratulated on their decision to academise and the following advantages were outlined. The school was told it now had the…

> Freedom to allocate budgets
> Freedom to decide how the curriculum should be delivered
> Freedom to set pay and conditions for staff
> Freedom to achieve value for money
> Freedom to change your governance
> Freedom to be flexible with the timing of school day and terms

While this fits in with government's stated advantage of academisation giving freedom, it does not align with reality. The MATs scheme of delegation allows only four of those freedoms (and most trusts allow less). Any governors deciding to join a MAT are choosing to give up a degree of their power (something governors in the case studies were generally aware of) and give it to a CEO and board of non-executive directors. Like democracy, autonomy is something reserved for the few: CEOs and non-executive directors are able to run schools in a way not possible in the maintained sector (for example they can deviate from national pay and conditions and the National

Curriculum). Stevenson argues that a small number of school leaders are "elevated to the status of CEOs with increased numbers reduced to the status of branch managers" (2018:223). This does not sound preferable for the lowly branch managers, but there is evidence in the data to suggest that the neoliberal tensions are such that having leaders above you is a reassurance. While in the case of the schools already converted, clearly concerns about autonomy were not enough to deter them from joining a MAT, the frequency with which the topic appeared in the data suggests this is another area where neoliberalism is imperfect in achieving its aims. It is likely that some governors have been deterred from joining a MAT because the value of autonomy is promoted by neoliberalism, but it is neoliberalism (or more specifically, academisation) which will take it away.

A more coherent aspect of neoliberalism and autonomy in schools can be seen where the pressures on schools create a climate where governors willingly give up power because the expectations are too high or the fear of failure, for example, a bad OFSTED report, is too much. Governors in Case Study 1 appreciated the support of the MAT when appointing a new head, rather than expressing the loss of decision-making power. Governors in Case Study 2 were, to an extent, driven by memories of historic problems at the school which were experienced when they had much more autonomy. Here we see the loss of autonomy is then not categorised as a problem; loss of autonomy is thought of as positive, because the support from the MAT is valued.

Finance constraints (post 2008 financial crisis)

There were numerous references to the financial pressures in my data, although this was not universally an issue. Case Study 1 had clearly been influenced by their concerns over financial sustainability, with the CEO of the trust they eventually joined promising to support the school in this area with a pledge to reduce costs through central procurement efficiencies. In Case Study 3, governors speculated that "academisation has the potential to make good savings".

The theme of finance encouraging schools to join a MAT was not universally found though. There was less evidence for finance being a driving force for the case study schools joining a trust, than there was for governance and LAs. Given that there was some concern about schools' reserves being pooled and the fact that at the point of conversion a school's budget technically belongs to the MAT - even if most MATs still ring fence each individual school's budget (Kreston, 2019) – it may

be that for financially stable schools, the budgetary issues of others may act as a deterrent to joining a trust. Case Study 1 saw the benefit of being in a MAT as helping to provide financial security, but their financial concerns were clear from their minutes and greater than the other case studies. For schools in a better financial position, there was a different view. Case Study 2 were concerned about losing 'their' money for instance.

Here we see neoliberal influences working against each other to disrupt the aim of schools joining academy trusts. Much of the performative influences we see in the neoliberal school system are focused on individual schools. OFSTED inspections are a prime example; schools are judged as independent institutions with no credit given for collaborating with others (Dewes, 2016). Therefore, what motivation is there for a school with money to join a group of schools and support others financially? In the literature review I pointed out that it is not yet clear from existing research to what extent resistance to policy counters governmentality and the movement towards Foucault's "convenient end" (2009:482). The resistance to policy in the case of academisation has largely been thought of as external, i.e. parents or political groups who are outside of the decision-making circle. However, there is evidence in the research data that some resistance is not external to neoliberalism - it is neoliberalism itself because it fails to provide a coherent programme where all are working towards the same conclusion. One of the main goals of neoliberalism has been the reduction of state influence (Taylor & Jordan, 2009) – something that academisation of schools would contribute towards, but the pressure on schools to succeed in an OFSTED inspection or for their examination results to be such that the school performs well in a league table, means that a collective approach (joining a MAT and sharing resources) is not directly rewarded. While there is evidence of governing bodies being sold that joining a MAT will help with performative measures – Case Study 1 is an example of this - I argue that the performative measures which schools operate under have not caught up with the academy system. This may be beginning to change; OFSTED has carried out some 'MAT Summary Evaluations' – an inspection of a whole trust, but these are still rarely carried out (FFT Datalab, 2019). I suggest that in a neoliberal system, people will act in a particular way if the performativity objectives encourage them to do so. Changing the accountability regime could be a powerful way to encourage change. It could also have the opposite effect: The centralised powers within the academy system at the moment escape the scrutiny of OFSTED to a certain extent. A change may make the running of trusts less attractive to individuals.

The decline in the role of local authorities

While the influence of neoliberalism can be seen in tensions around governance and finance, and in both there are examples of the neoliberal path not being smooth and having consequences running contrary to the neoliberal viewpoint, this is not so much the case with the third tension; the decline in the role of LAs.

An overwhelming theme was the way neoliberalism had reframed the relationship between LAs and the case study schools. Rather than seeing LAs as partners in the administration of education, as was the case in the post-war period (Simon, 1999), LAs were seen as a supplier of services. If the finance or HR offer was not value for money, governing boards were unhappy. LAs were seen as having a monopoly and went against the assumed neoliberal trope of consumer choice. It is noticeable that the school with the least references to the role of the LA is Case Study 1. As the first school to convert, it may be that the LA had not declined sufficiently at the point they were considering to join a trust for this to be a major factor in their decision making. An alternative narrative is that the academisation discourse had not quite succeeded in creating the illusion of a crisis. In the other case studies, there was a clear concern over the LA's service and academisation was seen as a way of breaking out of what had almost resorted to a commercial arrangement. However, the 'consumers' thought they had little choice in the supplier and this caused dissatisfaction. In Case Study 3, a less experienced governor was less clear on this idea, suggesting that those who have more of a peripheral role might offer a dissenting voice. The fact that decisions over services in MATs are typically not made by local governors did not seem to deter governors, regardless of their aforementioned preoccupation with the question of autonomy.

The coronavirus pandemic did give an elevated role to LAs, one that subverted thirty years of neoliberal trends to a decline in the LA (Dewes, 2020) and this was recognised by Case Study 2. Here we see the vulnerability of neoliberalism when its work is uncompleted. With many schools still maintained and an unforeseen crisis suddenly emerging, the government had little choice but to give a role to LAs and given the opportunity there is some suggestion it was taken. While my data suggests neoliberal inspired tensions do lead to schools joining MATs, an unexpected tension (to put it mildly) such as the pandemic, may have the opposite effect.

Neoliberalism as a controlling influence

As explained in the literature review, after a period where individual schools were forced to become academies or schools more generally were encouraged to academise, in 2016 the government announced that by 2020 all schools will be academies or in the process of converting to academy status. This policy direction was short lived and there was a resumption of the approach of becoming an academy being a punitive measure for a small number of schools judged to be underperforming and something for other schools to choose.

Throughout much of my data there is evidence of Foucault's concept of governmentality and Fairclough's idea of common sense. In Case Study 3 for instance, the chair of governors had put his own political beliefs to one side to support joining an academy trust. Despite having little sympathy with the government of the day, he was becoming a willing participant in the government project. Language was seen as a controlling influence. Governors are encouraged through the use of a 'net' of related texts to think and act in certain ways. This is not to say that the Governance Handbook or the OFSTED Inspection Framework are telling schools to join MATs, but I argue that they pave the path by normalising a neoliberal culture. This connects to Foucault's concept of power/knowledge, where power is based on knowledge and makes use of knowledge, as well as power reproducing knowledge by shaping it in a way to meet a particular end (2008).

When analysing textual data with content analysis, references to the node 'government agenda' were noticeably less frequent the longer the school had been an academy. I suggest that this supports the idea of the government's agenda becoming common sense. Policy become naturalised and is no longer subject to critical interrogation.

In Case Study 2, the headteacher was uneasy at the power given to governors as lay people. The concept of lay person - someone who is not an expert in or does not have a detailed knowledge of a particular subject - runs contrary to the professionalisation of governors. Through such developments, alternative and dissenting voices are squeezed out.

There is evidence that not all governors were equally susceptible to such influences. The most likely source of a different voice came from those governors who were less experienced in education or governance and were therefore less prone to neoliberal influences. To explain this further I take figure 5.4 and expand it in figure 7.1 to not only include those involved in governance (in the darker

shades of blue towards the centre of figure, but also the wider public (in white to the extremities of the figure). Those at the centre are subject more to the controlling influence of neoliberalism, they take a pragmatic approach to rationalise the tensions schools experience. Those further from the periphery may not have been subject to the process where the politically contentious has become common sense, while those outside governance - the wider public - may disagree substantially with academisation. This explains why governors were largely uninfluenced by media stories relating to the ideas of tensions around finance. While those in the wider public may react to such tensions in protest, governors in my case studies were generally compliant and pragmatic.

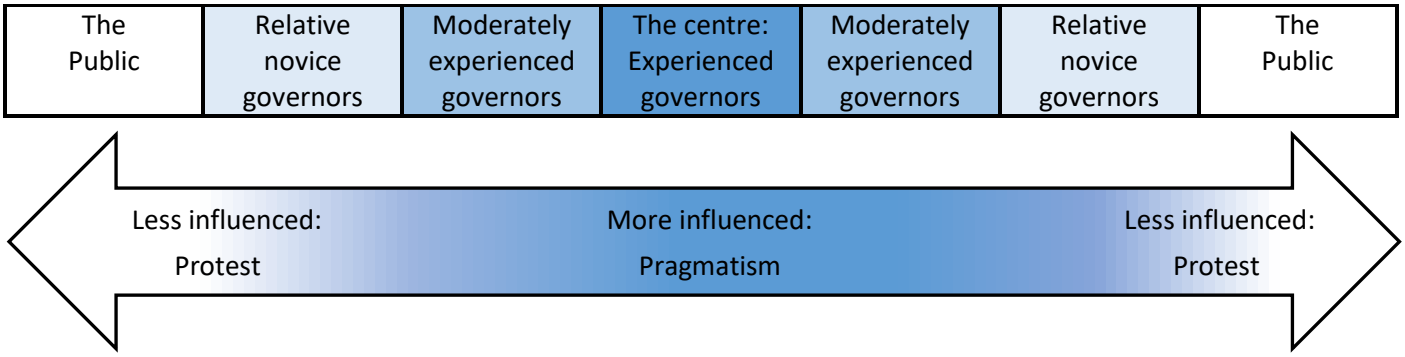

Figure 7.1: *Pragmatism vs. protest: The impact of governors' experience on their attitudes towards academisation.*

There is some evidence that neoliberalism is not, ironically, efficient. I have referred to several points where the data shows a path to academisation that is not smooth, for example the bureaucracy of joining a trust being a barrier, especially when the skillset expectations have led to a limited supply of suitable governors. This characterises an unpredictable aspect of neoliberalism. The course of my research coincided with the coronavirus pandemic and this unpredictable event has had a mixed influence on schools joining MATs. Mirroring the reference to flooding in New Orleans leading to expansion of Charter Schools (Klein, 2007), some have used COVID as evidence for the benefits of being part of the trust. Research sponsored by the Confederation of School Trusts claimed that the pandemic has shown the "strong sense of efficacy, agency and robust resilience" in MATs (Day et al.) and one of the case study headteachers commented positively on the support of a MAT. Another though had valued their LA more during the pandemic. I conclude that neoliberal tensions, while shown to contribute significantly to encouraging schools to join MATs, are not predictable.

Contribution to knowledge

A key component of any doctoral thesis is the original contribution to knowledge (Burgess et al. 2006), so at this point I will highlight the most salient contributions to knowledge from my thesis, placing each point in the context of the existing literature:

Firstly, although research about academisation has been carried out before (Elliott 2011, Wilkins 2016a, Rayner 2017), none has had a multi-case study approach staggered over time, while focusing on schools which are choosing, or close to choosing, to academise.

While there has been a significant amount of writing on the skillset/stakeholder debate in governance (Young 2015, Baxter 2016 and Connolly 2017), this has often portrayed the two approaches as binary opposites. My research highlights the way the two exist (albeit uneasily) alongside each other in the case studies researched, with there being an institutionalised focus on skills, but a reliance on those with local links to govern.

My research also makes clear that the neoliberal influences on education are extensively documented (Smith 2012b, Brighouse 2016, Wilkins, 2018), although my research sheds particular new light into the way neoliberalism has framed governing boards' views of LAs as being that of a service provider and this has hastened boards moving towards MATs.

Next, although it is clear that there is an established theory of neoliberalism perpetuating through crises (Klein 2007, Crouch 2011), but my research is the first to apply the theory to the academisation of the English education system.

Another important aspect that although there is a significant body of writing which focuses on the way people can be encouraged to act in certain ways which are amenable to the government (Fairclough 1996, Foucault 2010, Ball 2013), however my research takes this further by applying this to the specific area of academisation and highlighting pockets of resistance amongst more junior members of governing boards. This undermines the progress of neoliberalism.

Finally, the coronavirus pandemic, while creating some barriers to my data collection, created a unique situation through which the roles of various actors in the academisation of schools (particularly LAs) could be viewed. This provides a further example of the fragility of neoliberal influences.

The future - full academisation?

Having established the neoliberal tensions experienced by governing boards are encouraging schools to join MATs, albeit with neoliberalism displaying some unpredictable results, I will conclude by speculating whether these factors will continue to be influential in the future. With the government not mandating full academisation, other than for a brief period in 2016, the question remains whether we will ever see a fully academised system. My data suggests that the neoliberal tensions have influenced schools towards joining MATs, but are these influences strong enough to complete the journey? In February 2021 the Education Secretary Gavin Williamson stated that by 2025 he wanted to see more schools in MATs and the government was "actively looking at how we can make that happen" (DfE, 2021). but once more the government stopped short of it being mandatory (DfE 2021). A subsequent policy announcement was made which was aimed at encouraging schools to join trusts. This enabled MATs to offer a 'try before you buy' approach to joining a MAT. While this announcement garnered some attention in the media, it was in essence a rehash of a previous policy (Dickens, 2021). I would speculate that it will have little impact on the number of schools joining MATs, despite it being a headline grabbing announcement. To use the analogy of an iceberg (see figure 7.2), policy announcements which are ostensibly about academisation are not necessarily the most significant feature; beneath the waterline are less well visible policy pressures relating to the neoliberal tensions I have identified. Herein lies part of my thesis' original contribution; it casts light on the influences on significant school reform which are out of sight.

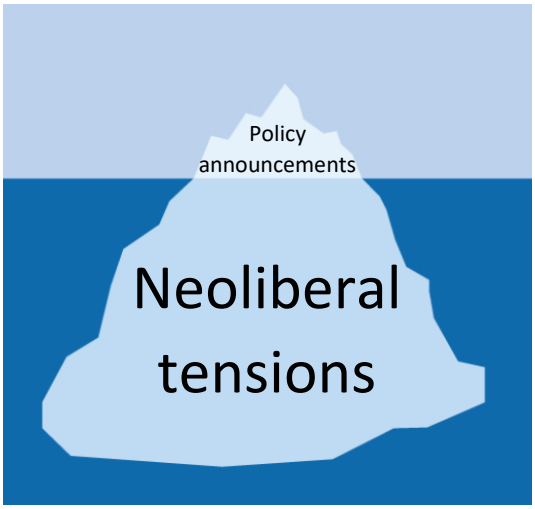

Figure 7.2: The relative insignificance of policy announcements

The pro-academy Confederation of School Trusts advocated an ostensibly gentler approach: "We need to take people with us as we continue our journey to bring about further changes in the structure of our education system" (2021). I would argue that while such an approach may seem gentle, it is in essence, the same as the subtle ways of governmentality; like a well-planned burglary where there is little sign of a break in, in the data that I collected which related to conversion, there was little sign of struggle or resistance.

The focus of my research is maintained schools joining trusts. In the literature review I referred to Rayner's timeline of 'waves' in the history of academies (2017) and suggested a new fifth wave which captures the slower recent rate of academisation and the emerging trend of MATs merging. The literature review also points out the long-term influence of neoliberalism, with it influencing education since the 1980s. Here I argue that the evidence from my research of neoliberal influences encouraging governors to join MATs (which themselves epitomise a neoliberal approach) may soon become a precursor to a second, repeat of this movement. After a school joins a trust, if that trust is not of a big enough size (again neoliberal tensions encouraging MATs to look to secure economies of scale and discredit smaller trusts as unsustainable) they may well find themselves going through a process of a merger or a takeover. This is turn would likely lead to more centralisation and a further decline in autonomy for individual schools and local actors such as parents, staff and governors.

It was as an undergraduate that I first developed an interest in education. Seminars on education policy (while reading politics and social policy) ultimately led to my career in teaching. Twenty years ago I wrote my undergraduate dissertation on the history of selection in the English school system. In it I charted the rise of grammar schools, the objections they raised from many and the subsequent decline, but that ultimately this did not lead to their eradication. There are currently 163 grammar schools in England (House of Commons Library, 2020), each a relic of an incomplete reform journey. They sit alongside middle schools, city technology colleges and studio schools as examples of policies which were not seen through to completion. Academisation may well be another part of a fragmented system or it may still become *the* system. My research leads me to conclude neoliberalism is a powerful force which has encouraged many schools to join trusts and will continue to do so, but as powerful an influence as it is, there are too many ways in which it

contradicts or works against itself for it to realise full academisation without further government intervention.

Bibliography

Abbott, I. Rathbone, M. and Whitehead, P. (2012). *Education Policy* London: SAGE Publications.

Academies Commission (2013). *Unleashing Greatness - Getting the Best from an Academised System* Available at https://www.thersa.org/reports/unleashing-greatness-getting-the-best-from-an-academised-system (accessed 14th April 2021).

Allcroft, G. (2016). *Welcome to a Multi-academy Trust: A Guide for Newly Appointed Trustees* Birmingham, National Governors Association

Arthur, J. Waring, M. Coe, R and Hedges, L. (2012). *Research Methods and Methodologies in Education* London: Sage Publishing.

Arthur, J. (2015). *Extremism and Neo-Liberal Education Policy: A Contextual Critique of the Trojan Horse Affair in Birmingham Schools* British Journal of Education Studies, Volume 63, No.3

Ashlawn School (2017). *Transforming Lives Educational Trust: Trustees Report and Financial Statement 2017* [online]. Available at http://fluencycontent2-schoolwebsite.netdnassl.com/FileCluster/AshlawnSchool/MainFolder/Governors/Annual-Reports--Financial-Statements---31st-August-2016.pdf [Accessed 22nd October 2018].

Baxter, J. (2016). *School Governance: Policy, Politics and Practices* Bristol: Policy Press

Baxter, J. & Cornforth, C. (2019). *Governing Collaborations: How Boards Engage with their Communities in Multi-academy Trusts in England* in *Public Management Review.*

Ball, S. Vincent, C. and Radnor, H. (1997). *Into Confusion: LEAs, Accountability and Democracy*. Journal of Education Policy 12: 147–163.

Ball, S. (2001). *Performativities and Fabrications in the Education Economy* in *The RoutledgeFalmer Reader in Sociology of Education*

Ball, S. (2003). *The Teacher's Soul and the Terrors of Performativity* in *Journal of Education Policy* 18:2, 215-228

Ball, S. J. (2013). *Foucault, Power and Education* Abingdon: Routledge.

Bathmaker, A. (2015). *Thinking with Bourdieu: Thinking After Bourdieu. Using 'Field' to Consider In/Equalities in the Changing Field of English Higher Education*, Journal of Education, 45:1, 61-80 Cambridge.

BBC (2010) Q&A: Academies and free schools [online]. Available at https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10161371 [accessed 18/9/19].

BBC (2016) *Academy Chain to Scrap Governing Bodies* [online]. Available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-35347602 [accessed 29/5/17].

BBC (2016b) *Thousands of Smaller Schools 'Financially Not Viable* Available at https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-37860682 [accessed 16/12/20].

BBC (2019a) *Swinford School Board Resigns in Head Teacher Redundancy Row* [online]. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-47893372 [Accessed 29/5/19].

BBC (2019b) *Head Teacher Talks of Cleaning Toilets in Funding Shortage* [online]. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-47482587 [accessed 16/6/19].

Bellefield, C. & Sibieta, L. (2016). *Long-Run Trends in School Spending in England* London: Fiscal Institute for Studies.

Bevir, M. (2008). *Key Concepts in Governance*. Sage.

Boas, T. and Gans-Morse, J. (2009). *Neoliberalism: From New Liberal Philosophy to Anti-Liberal Slogan* in *Studies.* Comparative International Development. 44 (2): 137–161.

Bourke, T. Lidstone, J. & Ryan, M. (2013). *Teachers Performing Professionalism: A Foucauldian Archaeology* SAGE Open.

Bourke, B. (2014). Positionality: Reflecting on the Research Process. The Qualitative Report, 19(33), 1-9. Available at https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol19/iss33/3 [Accessed 1/6/17].

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste.* Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (2003). *Firing Back: Against the Tyranny of the Market 2 (Vol. 2)*. Verso.

Bermeo, N. & Pontusson, J. (2012*). Coping with Crisis: Government Reactions to the Great Recession* New York: Russel Sage Foundation.

Brady, A. (2006). *Opportunity Sampling* in V. Jupp (Ed.), *The SAGE Dictionary of Social Research Methods* (pp. 205-206). London: Sage Publications.

Breen, L. (2007). *The researcher 'in the middle': Negotiating the insider/outsider dichotomy* in *The Australian Community Psychologist* 19(1), 163-174.

Bregman, R. (2020). *Humankind: A Hopeful History* London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Brown, G. Gillian, B. and Yule, G. (1983). *Discourse Analysis* Cambridge University Press.

Bubb, S. Crawford, M. Early, P. Eddy-Spicer, D. & D. James, C. (2019). *Headteacher Performance Management in England: Balancing Internal and External Accountability Through Performance Leadership* in *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 47(2), pp. 170–188.

Campbell, J. (2010). *Neoliberalism's Penal and Debtor States.* Theoretical Criminology: 14 (1): 59–73.

Canaan, J. (2011). *Critical Pedagogy in Against and Beyond the Neoliberalised University.* London: Economic and Social Research Council.

Carson, D. Gilmore, A. Perry, C. and Gronhaug, K. (2001) *Qualitative Marketing Research* London: Sage.

Castetter, W. (1992). *The Personnel Function in Educational Administration* Macmillan Publishing Company.

Chapman, C. Lindsay, G. Muijs, D. Harris, A. Arweck, E. and Goodall, J. (2010). *Governance, Leadership, and Management in Federations of Schools* in *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* 21(1), pp.53-74.

Chang, H. (2008). *Autoethnography as Method* Walnut Creek, California, Left Coast Press.

Chong, C. &Yeo, K. (2015). *An Overview of Grounded Theory Design in Educational Research* Asian Social Science, 11(12), p.258.

Christensen, D. H. and Dahl, C. M. (1997). *Rethinking Research Dichotomies*. Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal, 25: 269-285.

Clarke, J. (2008). *Living With/in and Without Neo-liberalism* Focaal, 2008(51), pp.135-147.

Coles, J. (2021). *The Question is Why MATs Are So Small, Not Why They're So Big* in SchoolsWeek [online]. Available at: https://schoolsweek.co.uk/the-question-is-why-mats-are-so-small-not-why-theyre-so-big/ [Accessed 1/5/21].

Collins, H. (2010). *Creative Research: The Theory and Practice of Research for the Creative Industries* AVA Publications.

Confederation of School Trusts (2019). *The Future Shape of the Education System in England* Confederation of School Trusts, Nottingham.

Confederation of School Trusts (2021a). *Joining with or Merging School Trusts* Confederation of School Trusts, Nottingham.

Confederation of School Trusts (2021b). *A Bridge to the Future* Confederation of School Trusts, Nottingham.

Connolly, M. Farrell, C. and James, C. (2017). *An Analysis of the Stakeholder Model of Public Boards and the Case of School Governing Bodies in England and Wales* in *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* Vol. 45(1) 5–19.

Conservative Party (2019). *We're giving a £14 billion pound cash boost to schools across the UK* Available at https://vote.conservatives.com/news/were-giving-a-ps14-billion-cash-boost-to-schools-across-the-uk [Accessed on 24/12/19]

Cohen, L. Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (1994). *Educational Research Methodology* Athens: Metaixmio.

Cox, C. and Dyson, A. (eds) (1969). *Black Paper Two: The Crisis in Education* London: The Critical Quarterly Society.

Creswell J. and Plano Clark, V. (2011). *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research* Thousand Oaks, CA, USA: Sage Publications Inc.

Crouch, C. (2011). *The Strange Non-death of Neoliberalism* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Crowther, D. & Lancaster, G. (2008). *Research Methods: A Concise Introduction to Research in Management and Business Consultancy* Butterworth-Heinemann.

Davies, W. (2016). *The Limits of Neoliberalism: Authority, Sovereignty and the Logic of Competition* Sage.

Davies, W. and Gane, N. (2021) *Post-Neoliberalism? An Introduction* Theory, Culture & Society.

Day, C. Taneva, S. and Smith. R. (2021). *System Leadership in Disruptive Times: Robust Policy Making and Enactment in School Trusts* Confederation of School Trusts [online] Available at: https://cstuk.org.uk/assets/pdfs/QR_system_leadership_in_disruptive_times_report_2021.pdf Accessed 1/5/21

Dean, M. (1991). *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* London: Sage.

Dean, M. (2014). *Rethinking Neoliberalism* in *Journal of Sociology*, 50(2), pp.150-163.

Deem, R. Brehony, K. and Heath, H (1995). *Active Citizenship and the Governing of Schools* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.) (2008). *The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry* in *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry* Thousand Oaks, CA : Sage Publications Inc.

Dewes, I. (2016). *Towards a Self-improving School System: Two Steps Forward One Step Back?* Available at: https://www.belmas.org.uk/BELMAS-Blog/towards-a-self-improving-school-system-two-steps-forward-one-step-back [Accessed 14th March 2021]

Dewes, I., (2020). *The Role of Local Authorities in the English School System: Why Did the Coronavirus Pandemic Subvert 30 Years of Neoliberal Policy?* in International Studies in Educational Administration (Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration & Management (CCEAM)), 48(1).

Dewes, I. (2021). *Reinstating Local Democratic Accountability in the English Academy School System*, presented at *The Jamaican Institute for Educational Administration and Leadership's International Conference on Educational Leadership and Management 2021 (online)* March 8th 2021.

DfE (2013a). *Numbers of Open Academies and Free Schools* Department for Education, London.

DfE (2013b). *Academies Annual Report, Academic Year 2011-12* Department for Education, London.

DfE (2016a). *How Curriculum Planning Can Achieve Greater Financial Efficiency* Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e23wWyHZa3U [Accessed 25/10/19.]

DfE (2016b). *10 Facts You Need to Know About Academy Schools* https://www.gov.uk/government/news/10-facts-you-need-to-know-about-academies [Accessed 16/1/19]

DfE (2016c). *Educational Excellence Everywhere* Department for Education, London.

DfE (2017a). *Governance Handbook* Department for Education, London.

DfE (2017b). https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-professional-qualification-for-executive leadership npqel [online]. [Accessed on 27th October 2018.]

DfE (2017c). Speech given by Nick Gibb to the Freedom and Autonomy for Schools National Association autumn conference. *The power of greater freedom and autonomy for schools* available at https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/nick-gibb-the-power-of-greater-freedom-and-autonomy-for-schools [Accessed 19/8/19].

DfE (2018a). *The Proportion of Pupils in Academies and Free Schools in England, in October 2018* Ad-hoc notice: January 2019 Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/772809/Proportion_of_pupils_in_academies_and_free_schools.pdf [Accessed 18/8/19]

DfE (2018b) *Written statement to parliament October 2018* [online]. Available at: https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2016-10-19/HCWS203

DfE (2019a). *Running Rural Primary Schools Efficiently* London.

DfE (2019b). *The Governance Handbook* London.

DfE (2019c). 20*19/20 School Improvement Offer: Briefing for NLEs* London.

DfE (2019d). *Summary statistics: School Improvement support for 2018 to 2019 academic year* London.

DfE (2019e). *National Professional Qualification (NPQ) Content and Assessment Framework: A Guide for NPQ Participants* London.

DfE (2019f). *Academies Have More Control Over How They Do Things* https://www.gov.uk/types-of-school/academies [Accessed 16th December 2019].

DfE (2020a). *PM Statement on Coronavirus* [online] (Available at: from https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-on-coronavirus-18-march-2020 [Accessed 15th June 2020].

DfE (2021). Education Secretary speech to FED National Education Summit [online] Available at: Education Secretary speech to FED National Education Summit - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Dixon's OpenSource (2020). *Who We Are – the History and Founder's Mentality* Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vstSdZRsIgg [Accessed 1/10/21.]

Dudovskiy, J. (2018). *The Ultimate Guide to Writing a Dissertation in Business Studies: A Step-by-Step Assistance* Self-published.

Duménil, G. and Lévy, D. (2011). *The Crisis of Neoliberalism* Harvard University Press.

Duggan, L., (2012) *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*. Beacon Press.

Eagleton-Pierce, M. (2016). *Neoliberalism: The Key Concepts* Routledge.

Education Funding Agency (2006). *Investigation Report: Perry Beeches The Academy Trust* [online] Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/573319/Investigation_report_Perry_Beeches_The_Academy_Trust_December_2016.pdf [Accessed on 19th October 2018].

Education and Skills Funding Agency (2018) *Academies Financial Handbook* [online]. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/714474/Academies_Financial_Handbook_2018.pdf [Accessed on 22nd October 2018].

Elkind D. (2004) *The Problem with Constructivism* The Educational Forum, 68:4, 306-312,

England, K. (1994). *Getting Personal: Reflexivity, Positionality, and Feminist Research.* The Professional Geographer, 46(1), 80–89.

Etikan, I. Musa, S., & Alkassim, R. (2016). *Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling* in *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1-4.

Exley, S. (2017). *A Country on Its Way to Full Privatisation? Private Schools and School Choice in England* in *Private Schools and School Choice in Compulsory Education* (pp. 31-47). Springer VS, Wiesbaden.

Eyles, A. Machin, S. & McNally, S. (2017). *Unexpected School Reform: Academisation of Primary Schools in England*. Journal of Public Economics, 155, 108-121.

Fairclough, N. (1996). *Language and Power* Harlow, Addison Wesley Longman.

Fairclough, N. (2001). *Language and Power* Pearson Education.

Fairclough, N. (2003). *Critical Discourse Analysis* in Wetherell, M., Taylor, S. and Yates, S. (eds) *Discourse as Data: A Guide for Analysis* London, Sage.

f40 (2019). *School Funding Briefing – April 2019* [online]. Available at: http://www.f40.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/School-Funding-Briefing-Paper-April-2019.pdf

Farnsworth, K. & Irving, Z. (2015) *Social Policy in the Age of Austerity* in Farnsworth, K. & Irving, Z. (eds.) *Social Policy in Times of Global Austerity: Global Economic Crisis and the New Politics of Welfare.* Bristol: Bristol University Press.

Fellows, T. (2019) *Exploring the Time it Takes to Chair a MAT* Birmingham: National Governance Association.

FFT Datalab (2019) *Exploring MAT Ofsted Ratings* Available at: https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/2019/05/exploring-mat-ofsted-ratings/ [Accessed 14th March 2021].

The Financial Times (2019) *Third of Councils to Run Out of Money for Statutory Services by 2022* https://www.ft.com/content/4690d0ac-9c01-11e9-b8ce-8b459ed04726 [accessed 24/11/19].

Fielding, N. and Lee, R. (1998) *Computer Analysis and Qualitative Research* London: Sage.

Firestone, W. and Herriott, R. (1983). *The Formalization of Qualitative Research: An Adaptation of Soft Science to the Policy World.* Evaluation Review 7[4] 437-66.

Fitzsimons, P. (2002). *Neoliberalism and Education: The Autonomous Chooser* in *Radical Pedagogy*, 4(2), pp.1-12.

Fogelman & Comber in Briggs & Coleman eds. (2007) *Research Methods in Educational Leadership and Management* London: Sage.

Foucault, M. (1979). *Discipline and Punish*. London: Penguin.

Foucault, M. (1982). *Afterword: The Subject and Power* in: Dreyfus, H. and Rabinow, P. *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* Chicago: The Harvester Press.

Foucault, M. & Gordon, C. (1980). *Power/knowledge*. New York: Pantheon Books

Foucault, M. (2002) *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Abingdon, Routledge.

Foucault, M. (2008). *The History of Sexuality*. London: Penguin.

Foucault, M. Senellart, M. Ewald, F. and Fontana, A. (2007). *Security, Territory, Population* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Foucault, M. (2010). *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1978-79.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Freeman, R.E. (1984). *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach.* Boston, MA: Pitman.

Gardels, N. (2008). *Stiglitz: The Fall of Wall Street is to Market Fundamentalism What the Fall of the Berlin Wall Was to Communism* in *The Huffington Post* 16th September [online]. Available at https://www.huffpost.com/entry/stiglitz-the-fall-of-wall_b_126911.

Gann, N. (2016) *Improving School Governance: How Better Governors Make Better Schools* Routledge: Oxford.

Gee, J. (2005) *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* Routledge, London.

Gewirtz, S. & Ball, S. (2000) *From 'Welfarism' to 'New Managerialism': Shifting Discourses of School Headship in the Education Marketplace* in Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 21:3, 253-268.

Golding, P. (1999) *Thinking the Unthinkable: Welfare Reform and the Media* in Franklin, B. (Ed) *Social Policy, the Media and Misrepresentation* Abingdon: Routledge.

Gorard, S. (2014). *The Link Between Academies in England, Pupil Outcomes and Local Patterns of Socio-economic Segregation between Schools* Research Papers in Education, 29(3), pp.268-284.

Gordon, C. (Ed.) (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. New York: Pantheon

Grenfell, M. (Ed.), (2014). *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts* Routledge.

The Guardian (2008) Brian Cox Obituary [online]. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/apr/28/culture.obituaries (Accessed on 23rd February 2018).

The Guardian (2016) *Axing Parent Governors in Schools is the Opposite of Cameron's 'Parent Power'* [online]. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/mar/22/parent-governor-schools [Accessed 29/5/1]. (Accessed on 19th June 2018).

The Guardian (2018a) [online]. Available at https://www.theguardian.com/education/2018/feb/22/dfes-plans-to-convert-schools-to-academies-stalled-in-many-areas-report (Accessed on 9th September 2019).

The Guardian (2018b) [online]. *Founders give up managing Greenwich free school, citing excessive burden on governors* Available at https://www.theguardian.com/education/2018/aug/22/pioneering-free-school-in-london-to-be-taken-over-by-academy-trust (Accessed on 9th December 2019).

The Guardian (2019) *UK Statistics Body Has 'Serious Concerns' Over DfE Funding Claims* [online]. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/education/2018/oct/08/uk-statistics-body-has-serious concerns-over-dfe-funding-claims (Accessed on 9th April 2018).

Gunter, H. (2012). *Leadership and the Reform of Education*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Gutting, G. (2005). *Foucault: A Very Short Introduction* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hayek, F. (2006). *The Road to Serfdom* Oxford: Routledge.

Heilbronn, R., (2016). *Freedoms and Perils: Academy Schools in England* in *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 50(3), pp.306-318.

Hitchcock, G, Hughes, D (1995). *Research and the Teacher: A Qualitative Introduction to School-Based Research*. London: Psychology Press.

Hill, R. (2021). [BELMAS RIG Podcast] 1st April. *What Does it Mean to be a Governing Professional in Education*? Available at https://www.belmas.org.uk/Rig-GG/Latest/listen-the-first-belmas-rig-podcast [Accessed 16th April 2021].

Hodges, B. Kuper, A. and Reeves, S. (2008) *Discourse analysis* in *British Medical Journal*, *337*, pg. 879.

House of Commons Library Briefing Paper (2017). *FAQs: Academies and Free Schools Number 07059* [online] Available at: http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN07059/SN07059.pdf [Accessed on 20th May 2019].

House of Commons Library Briefing Paper (2020). *Grammar School Statistics* [online] Available at: Grammar school statistics - House of Commons Library (parliament.uk) [Accessed on 16th March 2021].

Hudson L. & Ozanne J. (1988). *Alternative Ways of Seeking Knowledge in Consumer Research* Journal of Consumer Research, 14(4), 508–521.

Hunter, S. (2003). *A Critical Analysis of Approaches to the Concept of Social Identity in Social Policy* in *Critical Social Policy* 23(3):322-344.

Hutchinson, J. (2016). *School Inspection in England: Is There Room to Improve?* [online] Education Policy Institute. Available at: http://You.org.uk/report/school-inspection-in-england/. [Accessed on 20th October 2018].

Hseih, H. F. & Shannon, S. (2005). *Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis.* Qualitative Health Research, Vol. 15 No. 9, November 2005 1277-1288.

Holland F. (2017). *School Governance in 2017* Birmingham: National Governance Association.

International Standard Classification of Occupations (2008). *The Resolution Adopting ISCO-08, the Classification Structure* https://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/stat/isco/docs/resol08.pdf. [Accessed on 31st July 2020].

Jäger, S. and Maier, F, (2009) Theoretical and Methodological Aspects of Foucauldian Critical Discourse Analysis and Dispositive analysis in Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis, 2, pp.34-61.

James, C. Brammer, S. Connolly, M. Fertig, M. James, J. and Jones, J. (2010). *The Hidden Givers: A Study of School Governing Bodies in England*. Reading: CfBT.

James C. Brammer S, Connolly M, Fertig M, James, J. and Jones, J. (2011). *School Governing Bodies in England Under Pressure: The Effects of Socio-economic Context and School Performance* in *Educational Management, Administration & Leadership 39(4): 414–433.*

James C, Goodall J, Howarth E and Knights E. (2014). *The State of School Governing in 2014.* University of Bath and the National Governors Association.

Johnson, R. Onwuegbuzie, A. and Turner, L. (2007). *Towards a Definition of Mixed Methods Research* in *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* 1(2), pp.112-133.

Joshi, A. Kale, S. Chandel, S. and Pal, D.K. (2015). *Likert scale: Explored and Explained* in *British Journal of Applied Science & Technology*, 7(4), p.396.

Katz, G. (2009). *The Crisis of Capitalism* in *The International Socialist Review*, issue 65.

Kershaw, I. (2014) *Report of Ian Kershaw of Northern Education for Birmingham City Council in Respect of Issues Arising as a Result of Concerns Raised in the "Trojan Horse Letter"* Birmingham City Council

Kiely, R. (2020). *Assessing Conservative Populism: A New Double Movement or Neoliberal Populism?* In *Development and Change* 51(2), pp.398-417.

Klikauer, T. (2013). *Managerialism: A Critique of an Ideology*. London, UK: Springer.

Klikauer, T. (2015). *What Is Managerialism?* Critical Sociology, *41*(7–8), 1103–1119.

Klein, N. (2007). *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism.* New York: Metropolitan Books.

Kotz, D. (2009) *The Financial and Economic Crisis of 2008: A Systemic Crisis of Neoliberal Capitalism* in *The Review of Radical Political Economics* Volume: 41 issue: 3, page(s): 305-317

Kreston (2019). *Academies Benchmark Report 2019* [online] Available at: https://www.jamescowperkreston.co.uk/downloads/kreston-academies-benchmark-report-2019.pdf [Accessed on 22/6/20].

Kuhn, T. (1996). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* London: The University of Chicago Press.

Kulz, C. (2020). *Everyday Erosions: Neoliberal Political Rationality: Democratic Decline and the Multi-Academy Trust* in *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, pp.1-16.

Labour Party (2019) *Labour Announces Plan to Improve Education Standards for All Children* Available at https://labour.org.uk/press/labour-announces-plan-to-improve-education-standards-for-all-children/ [Accessed on 24/12/19].

Ladd, H. & Fiske, E. (2016). *England Confronts the Limits of School Autonomy* Columbia University, Teachers College, National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education, Working Paper, (232).

legislation.gov.uk (2006). *Education and Inspections Act* [online] Available at https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/40/contents Accessed 20/12/20.

Lemke, T. (2007). *An Indigestible Meal? Foucault, Governmentality and State Theory* Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory, 8(2), pp.43-64.

Lippmann, W. (1993). *The Phantom Public* New York, NY: Transaction Publishers.

Littlejohn, S. & Foss, K. (2009). *Encyclopaedia of Communication Theory* Vol.1, SAGE Publication

De Lissovoy, N. (2013). *Pedagogy of the Impossible: Neoliberalism and the Ideology of Accountability* in *Policy Futures in Education*, 11(4), pp.423-435.

Lowndes, V. & Pratchett, P. (2012). *Local Governance Under the Coalition Government: Austerity, Localism and the 'Big Society'* Local Government Studies, 38:1, 21-40,

Lozano, J. (2005). *Towards the Relational Corporation: From Managing Stakeholder Relationships to Building Stakeholder Relationships* in Corporate Governance: The International Journal of Business in Society 5(2): 60–77.

Lynch, K., B. Grummell, B. and Devine, D. (2012). *New Managerialism in Education: Gender, Commercialisation and Carelessness* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lyotard, J. (1984). *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Vol. 10). U of Minnesota Press.

Machin, S. and Vernoit, J. (2012). *Changing School Autonomy: Academy Schools and their Introduction to England's Education* Centre for the Economics of Education Discussion Paper, 123, p.2.

MacLeavy, J. (2011). *A New Politics of Austerity, Workfare and Gender? The UK Coalition Government's Welfare Reform Proposals* Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society, Volume 4, Issue 3, November 2011, Pages 355–367.

Marshall, J. (1995). *Foucault and Neoliberalism: Bio-power and Busno-power* in Alven Neiman (Ed). Philosophy of Education. Illinois, Philosophy of Education Society, 320-329.

McEachern, R. (1998). *Meeting Minutes as Symbolic Action* Journal of Business and Technical Communication, 12(2).

McKee, K. (2009) *Post-Foucauldian Governmentality: What Does it Offer Critical Social Policy Analysis?* in *Critical Social Policy*, *29*(3), pp.465-486.

McNay, L. (1994). *Foucault: A Critical Introduction* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Mercer, J. (2007). *The Challenges of Insider Research in Educational Institutions: Wielding a Double-edged Sword and Resolving Delicate Dilemmas* Oxford Review of Education, 33:1, 1-17.

Miller, P. (2011). *Free Choice, Free Schools and the Academisation of Education in England* Research in Comparative and International Education, *6*(2), 170–182.

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2019). *The English Indicies of Deprivation 2019*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/835115/IoD2019_Statistical_Release.pdf [accessed 30/7/20].

Morris, J. (2020). *Is this the Culture of Academies? Utilising the Cultural Web to Investigate the Organisational culture of an Academy Case Study.* Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 48(1), 164–185.

NAO (2018). *Converting Maintained Schools to Academies* London: National Audit Office.

NEU (2019). The NEU Case Against Academisation [online]. Available at: https://neu.org.uk/advice/neu-case-against-academisation [accessed 20/12/29]

Ng, S. (2013*). Including Parents in School Governance: Rhetoric or Reality* in *International Journal of Educational Management*.

NGA (2017). *Annual Survey of School Governance* [online]. Available at: https://www.nga.org.uk/KnowledgeCentre/Compliance-(1)/School-governance-in-2017-an-annual-survey-by-NGA.aspx [accessed 20/5/19]

NGA (2019). *Annual Survey of School Governance* [online]. Available at: https://www.nga.org.uk/getmedia/10f021c3-7774-4e39-b2d3-84d5ae5a5115/School-Governance-Report-(WEB)-FINAL-2-9-19.pdf [accessed 29/7/20]

NGA (2020a). *Annual Survey of School Governance* [online]. Available at: https://www.nga.org.uk/Knowledge-Centre/research-(1)/Annual-school-governance-survey/School-governance-in-2020.aspx [accessed 15/12/20]

NGA (2020b). *Headteacher Appraisal: A Guide for Governing Boards* [online]. Available at https://www.nga.org.uk/Knowledge-Centre/Executive-leaders-and-the-governing-boards/Performance-management/Headteacher-Appraisal-A-Practical-Guide.aspx [accessed 14th April 2021).

NGA (2020c) *Governance Professional and Committee Clerk Role Description* [online]. Available at https://www.nga.org.uk/getmedia/59a8a816-adc1-406b-a571-1ebf97db176b/NGA-Governance-Professional-and-Committee-Clerk-model-role-description-Sept-2020.docx [accessed 16th April 2021].

NGA (2020d) *Guidance on Schemes of Delegation for Academy Trusts* [online]. Available at https://www.nga.org.uk/getmedia/5849889c-4e2c-4407-b84e-0589d3b39452/NGA-Scheme-of-Delegation-Guidance-Sept-2020.pdf Governance-Professional-and-Committee-Clerk-model-role-description-Sept-2020.docx [accessed 1/10/21].

Nickerson, R. (1998). *Confirmation bias: A Ubiquitous Phenomenon in Many Guises* in *Review of General Psychology* 2(2), pp.175-220.

NVivo (2014). *NVivo 10 for Windows* [online]. Available at: NVivo10-Getting-Started-Guide.pdf (qsrinternational.com) [accessed 19/1/21]

OFSTED (2015). *The Common Inspection Framework: Education, Skills and Early Years* Manchester.

Olmedo, A. and Wilkins, A. (2016). *Governing Through Parents: A Genealogical Enquiry of Education Policy and the Construction of Neoliberal Subjectivities in England* in *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 38(4), pp.573-589.

Pain, M. (2017). *Five Key Development Areas for MAT Sector in 2017/18* Available at: http://www.forumstrategy.org/some-key-challenges-and-opportunities-for-the-mat-sector/ [Accessed 27/04/2019].

Peck, J. (2010). *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason* Oxford University Press.

Peck, J. Theodore, N. Brenner, N. (2010). *Post-neoliberalism and its Malcontents* Antipode 41: 94–116.

Perryman, J. (2006). *Panoptic Performativity and School Inspection Regimes: Disciplinary Mechanisms and Life Under Special Measures* in *Journal of Education Policy*, 21:2, 147-161

Pierre, J. & Peters, B. (2019). *Governance, Politics and the State* Red Globe Press.

Pring, R. & Roberts, M. (Eds.) (2016). *A Generation of Radical Educational Change* Oxford: Routledge.

PKF-Taylor Francis (2018). *Integrated Curriculum Financial Planning: What Is It?* [online]. Available at: https://www.pkf-francisclark.co.uk/blog/integrated-curriculum-financial-planning-icfp-what-is-it/ [Accessed 24/10/2019].

Rayner, S. (2017). *Academisation: A Dynamic Process of Systemic Change in England* EdD Thesis, University of Manchester.

Roberts, N. and Danechi, S. (2019). *FAQs: Academies and Free Schools* House of Commons Library, London.

Robinson, S. (2012). *School and System Leadership*. London: Continuum.

Rose, N. (1999). *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self (Vol. 2)* London: Free Association Books.

Rose, N. (2005). *Governing 'Advanced' Liberal Democracies* In: Barry A, Osborne T and Rose N (Eds) Foucault and Political Reason. Abingdon: Routledge, 37–64.

Rutherford, S. (2007). *Green Governmentality: Insights and Opportunities in the Study of Nature's Rule* in *Progress in Human Geography* 31(3): 291-307.

Salokangas, M. and Chapman, C. (2014). *Exploring Governance in Two Chains of Academy Schools: A Comparative Case Study* Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 42(3), pp.372-386.

saveourhead.com (2019). [online]. [Accessed 29/5/19].

Savvides, N, Al-Youssef, J, Colin, M, Garrido, C (2016). *Methodological challenges: negotiation, critical reflection and the cultural other* in Crossley, M, Arthur, L, McNess, E (eds) *Revisiting Insider–Outsider Research in Comparative and International Education*. Southampton: Symposium Books, pp.113–144.

School Cuts (2018). *2,000 Headteachers March on Downing Street* [online]. Available at: https://schoolcuts.org.uk/story/2000-headteachers-downing-street/ [accessed 15/6/19].

SchoolsWeek (2018a). *£270k-a-year Head Quits Academy Trust Role* [online]. Available at https://schoolsweek.co.uk/270k-a-year-head-quits-academy-trust-role/. [Accessed on 20th October 2018].

SchoolsWeek (2018b). *Investigation: The Schools That Slip Through the Council Finance Net* [online]. Available at https://schoolsweek.co.uk/investigation-the-schools-that-slip-through-the-council-finance-net/ [Accessed on 13th January 2019].

SchoolsWeek (2018c). *Minister Bets Heads a Bottle of Champagne He Can Find Savings in their Schools* [online]. Available at https://schoolsweek.co.uk/minister-bets-heads-a-bottle-of-champagne-he-can-find-savings-in-their-schools/ [Accessed on 27th October 2019].

SchoolsWeek (2019). *Boris Johnson Pledges £4.6bn Per Year Extra for Schools* [online]. Available at https://schoolsweek.co.uk/minister-bets-heads-a-bottle-of-champagne-he-can-find-savings-in-their-schools/ [Accessed on 24th November 2019].

Shatkin, G. and Gershberg, A. (2007). *Empowering Parents and Building Communities: The Role of School-based Councils* in *Educational Governance and Accountability in Urban Education* 42(6), pp.582-615.

Shore, C. and Wright, S. (1999). *Audit Culture and Anthropology: Neo-liberalism in British Higher Education* the Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 5(4): 557–575.

Simkins, T. Coldron, J. Crawford, M & Jones, S. (2015). *Emerging Local Schooling Landscapes: The Role of the Local Authority* School Leadership & Management, 35:1, 1-16.

Simon, B. (1991). *Education and the Social Order* London: Lawrence & Wishart

Smith, A. (2012a). *An Enquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of the Nations* Ware: Wordsworth Editions.

Smith, E. (2012b). *Key Issues in Education and Social Justice* Los Angeles: SAGE.

Smith, & Abbott, I. (2013). *Governance Arrangements: New Types of Schooling* for the BELMAS Structural Reform Research Programme, Final Reports December 2013 [online]. Available at https://www.belmas.org.uk/write/MediaUploads/Smith_Final_Reports.pdf [accessed 29/5/19]

Spina, N. Harris, J. Carrington, S. and Ainscow, M. (2019). *Resisting Governance by Numbers* in Riddle, S. and Apple, M. (eds) *Re-imagining Education for Democracy* Routledge: London and New York, pp. 142-155.

Steger, M. and Roy, R. (2010). *Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stenson, K. (2005). *Sovereignty, Biopolitics and the Local Government of Crime in Britain* in *Theoretical Criminology*, *9*(3), pp.265-287.

Stevenson, H. (2018). *Transformation and Control: What Role for Leadership and Management in a 'School-led' System?* in *Education Governance and Social Theory: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Research*, p.209.

St. Helen's Reporter (2019) Councilor says St Helens schools in 'crisis' due to funding freezes https://www.sthelensreporter.co.uk/education/councillor-says-st-helens-schools-in-crisis-due-to-funding-freezes-1-10079836 [accessed 29/11/19].

Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of Qualitative Research* Sage Publications.

Symonds, J. and Gorard, S. (2008). *The Death of Mixed Methods: Research Labels and their Casualties* British Educational Research Association annual conference.

The Sunday Times (2014) *Islamic Plot to Take Over Schools* [online] Available at: https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/islamist-plot-to-take-over-schools-655mhbw0vtc [accessed 29/8/2019].

Tashakkori, A. & Teddlie, C. (2003). *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social & Behavioral Research* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Taylor, D. (1986). *Foucault on Freedom and Truth* in D. Taylor (Ed.) *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts* Durham: Acumen.

Taylor B, Jordan, G. (2009). *Neoliberalism: From New Liberal Philosophy to Anti-Liberal Slogan*. Studies in *Comparative International Development*. 44 (2): 137–61.

TES (2015). *Maintained School Headteachers Have More Freedom Than Those in Academy Chains* [online]. Available at: https://www.tes.com/news/school-news/breaking news/academies-boss-maintained-school-headteachers-have-more-freedom-those accessed

29/5/17 [Accessed 19th October 2018].

TES (2017). *Is Academisation Really Privatisation by Another Name?* https://www.tes.com/news/academisation-really-privatisation-another-name-evidence suggests-it-might-be [Accessed 30th December 2020].
TES (2018). *Need to Know: Cuts and Curriculum Financial Planning* [online]. Available at: https://www.tes.com/news/need-know-cuts-and-curriculum-financial-planning [Accessed 26th October 2019].

The Times (2019) *Head Teacher Says Funding Cuts Have Forced Her to Clean the Loos* [online] Available at https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/head-teacher-says-funding-cuts-have-forced-her-to-clean-the-loos-flj6d93rs [Accessed 27th October 2019].

Timmins, N. (2001). *The Five Giants: A Biography of the Welfare* State London: HarperCollins.

Uniteforeducation.org (2016). *England Rushes Forward with School Privatisation Agenda* Available at: https://www.unite4education.org/global-response/england-rushes-forward-with-school-privatisation-agenda-but-outcomes-far-from-certain/ [Accessed 30th December 2020].

Unluer, S. (2012). *Being an Insider Researcher While Conducting Case Study Research* in *The Qualitative Report* 2012 Volume 17, Article 58, 1-14.

Van Apeldoorn, B. and Overbeek, H. (2012). *The Life Course of the Neoliberal Project and the Global Crisis* in *Neoliberalism in Crisis* (pp. 1-20). Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Weownit.org.uk (2020). *Privatisation Fails Schools* Available at: https://weownit.org.uk/privatisation-fails/schools [Accessed 30th December 2020].

Wilkins, A. (2012). *Pedagogy of the consumer: The Politics of Neoliberal Welfare Reform* in *Journal of Pedagogy* [online] 3(2). Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.2478/v10159-012-0008-6 [Accessed 19th October 2018].

Wilkins A. (2016a). *Modernising School Governance: Corporate Planning and Expert Handling in State Education* Oxford: Routledge.

Wilkins, A. (2016b). *Rethinking Neoliberalism: Multi-academy Trusts and State-sanctioned Monopoly in British Education*. Conference paper presented at the European Network of Neoliberal Education Policy, University of Roehampton.

Wilkins, A. (2018). *Assembling Schools as Organisations: On the Limits and Contradictions of Neoliberalism* Sage.

Wilkins, A. (2021). *Deconstructing Governance: Perspectives in Post-positivist Thinking* in Peters, M. and Heraud, R. (eds) *Encyclopaedia of Educational Innovation* Springer: New York.

Wilkins, A. & Olmedo, A. eds., (2018). *Education Governance and Social Theory: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Research* Bloomsbury Publishing.

Wisdom J & Creswell J. (2013). *Mixed Methods: Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis While Studying Patient-Centered Medical Home Models* Rockville, MD: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

Woods, P. Woods, G. and Gunter, H. (2007). *Academy Schools and Entrepreneurialism in Education* Journal of Education Policy, 22(2), pp.237-259.

Yazan, B. (2015). *Three Approaches to Case Study Methods in Education: Yin, Merriam, and Stake* The Qualitative Report, 20(2), 134-152. Retrieved from https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol20/iss2/12 on 6/12/18

Yin, R. (1994). *Case Study Research: Design & Methods* California: Sage Publishing.

Yin R. (2012). *The Applications of Case Study Research* California: Sage Publishing.

YouGov (2017). *How Left or Right-wing are the UK's Newspapers?* [online] Available at https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2017/03/07/how-left-or-right-wing-are-uks-newspapers.

Young, H. (2015). *Governing Bodies: Knowledge, Experts and Accountability in School* Educational Management Administration & Leadership 45(1) November 2015.

Zhang, Y. and Wildemuth, B. (2009). *Unstructured interviews* in *Applications of Social Research Methods to Questions in Information and Library Science* pp.222-231.

Appendix 1: Questions asked in governor survey

1.When did you become a governor of this school?

- (•) 2020
- ( ) 2019
- ( ) 2018
- ( ) 2017
- ( ) 2016
- ( ) 2015
- ( ) 2014
- ( ) 2013
- ( ) 2012
- ( ) Before 2012

2.Why did you want to become a governor?

3.Why were you appointed as governor? (Tick all that apply.)

- [ ] Elected by parents
- [ ] Elected by staff
- [ ] By virtue of your position, e.g. headteacher, vicar, etc.
- [ ] Hold a particular professional skill (please specify in text box below)
- [ ] Appointed by Church/PCC
- [ ] Other (please specify in text box below)

4.If you need to add text to your answer for question 4, do so below. Otherwise, go to question 5.

5.What is your current job? If retired, please specify the main area of work during your career.

6.What is your home postcode? (This is asked so IDACI rankings of governors can be compared with the school they govern in. See the research participant information sheet for more information.

7.How many hours a year do you estimate you spend on governing duties at this school?

- ( ) Less than 20
- ( ) 21-40
- ( ) 41-60
- ( ) 61-80
- ( ) 81-100
- ( ) 100+

8.Do any of the following connections to the school apply to you? (Please tick all that apply.)

- [ ] Attended the school as a child
- [ ] Currently live near the school

- ☐ Used to live near the school
- ☐ Your child or children attended the school in the past
- ☐ Your child or children currently attend the school
- ☐ Other, please specify in the box below

9.If you need to add text to your answer for question 9, do so below. Otherwise, go to question 10.

10.What sort of governor are you?

- ○ Co-opted
- ○ Parent governor
- ○ Staff governor
- ○ Ex officio
- ○ Foundation
- ○ Other, please specify below
- ○ Not sure

11.If you need to add text to your answer for question 11, do so below. Otherwise, go to question 12.

12.What roles do you currently have on this governing board. Please tick all that apply.

- ☐ Link governor for a subject
- ☐ link governor for a year group of phase
- ☐ SEND
- ☐ Safeguarding
- ☐ Link governor for part of the school's improvement plan
- ☐ Sit on a committee
- ☐ Chair of the board
- ☐ Vice chair of the board
- ☐ Chair of a committee
- ☐ Vice chair of a committee
- ☐ Other, please specify below

13.If you need to add text to your answer for question 13, do so below. Otherwise, go to question 14.

15.Have you been/are you a governor in another school?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

16. Have read, are you aware or unaware of the following documents?

Governance Handbook

- ○ Aware
- ○ Read
- ○ Unaware

OFSTED Inspection Handbook

- ○ Aware
- ○ Read
- ○ Unaware

Academies Financial Handbook

- ○ Aware
- ○ Read
- ○ Unaware

Governor Competency Framework

- ○ Aware
- ○ Read
- ○ Unaware