

Frequently asked Questions

What will the merger mean on a day-to-day basis?

Schools will continue to operate as they do now on a day-to-day basis, although in the future there will be a streamlining of certain back office services. The leadership and teaching structures are unlikely to be changed in any significant way.

What are the financial implications?

Given the significant reductions in school budgets this will be an opportunity to make economies of scale, reduce back office costs and share non-teaching expertise. Any financial benefit should ultimately be felt in the classroom.

How will the local schools maintain their ethos?

Just as written our multi-academy trust individual school ethos is to be treasured. Schools have shared good practise and worked together on certain projects to the benefit of all children but not at the expense of what makes individual schools special. This will be the approach going forward and local schools will maintain 'governors' who will be their guardians.

How will the merger improve local schools?

By working in a larger group, particularly in the secondary phase, there will be wider opportunities to cross fertilise good practises. With a large group, such as this, there will be the opportunity to develop strong shared staff training. We hope we may be able to develop a teacher training offer so that we can train teachers and then develop providing good career progression routes across the group of schools in order that we maintain an exceptional staff.

The executive leadership structures across primaries and secondary sectors will help to ensure maintained performance when school leaders change. Schools are often vulnerable to dips in performance at such times but experience has demonstrated that the executive models provide significant reassurance at these points.

Will the merger increase staff movement?

As in the answer above we intend the merger to provide career routes that retain staff within the larger group so that investment in staff development is not lost. Some colleagues may move schools to support if there were an area of difficulty in another school but this is likely to be fairly rare. Dartmouth Academy is presently struggling and is in receipt of significant support from Kingsbridge Community College, which is outstanding. This support has included a senior member of staff taking over the leadership of Dartmouth. Kingsbridge Community College obviously brings huge strength to the group which is reflected in the fact that they were asked to take over Dartmouth by the DfE. Dartmouth is now on the road to recovery but illustrates a key principle for us going forward. There is a moral imperative for successful schools to support these that are struggling. There may be occasions in the future where we look beyond our group should we proceed with the merger to support another school in difficulty. It is crucial that all children receive a good education and we must play our part in the new national approach to help that to happen.

How will this merger benefit our children directly?

The improvement of the quality of teaching is covered above coming as a result of the sharing of good practise, joint professional development and staff retention however there will be a range of further opportunities for us to take advantage of. We would aspire to work together to develop bespoke provision and approaches to support students with particular needs. Current local provisions are expensive and piecemeal. By working together we could develop for more effective solutions for our children. The economies of scale, joint ordering of books etc. also offers better value for money solutions from which all schools and all children can directly benefit as we will get more for our money.

How will staff pay and conditions be impacted?

All staff will remain on their present pay and conditions as part of the TUUPE process.

*There will be a policy to try to ensure that children access courses and schools in the secondary phase in line with their needs and interests. The secondary schools have a range of schools who have a variety of strengths and opportunities. The new group would, if it comes to fruition, undertake to work collaboratively to facilitate the right child going to the 'right' school or accessing the 'right' course.

There will also be the opportunity to develop approaches to support and extend certain groups of students across the group. For example the introduction of a potential 'Oxbridge Group' where high performing students across the school work together to best prepare them to apply for and secure places at Oxford and Cambridge Universities.

Will all of the schools be able to work closely together on a weekly basis?

Given the geographical spread of the group the primary schools are likely to work in hubs with periodic whole school working. School leaders will work together more frequently. The spread of secondary schools is not as significant which will allow for more regular face to face work between staff but approaches such as Skype may also have a part to play.

What will the impact be on sixth form provision?

Sixth form funding has been significantly reduced and the Audit Commission is suggesting that sixth forms will need to be around 400 strong to be viable. The South Dartmoor Sixth Form is the highest attaining non selective sixth form in the county and compares extremely well nationally and unsurprisingly we want to make sure that its future is secure. We believe by close collaboration and sharing of resource with the Newton Abbot schools this can be achieved.

To Whom are Multi Academy Trusts answerable?

Multi Academy Trusts have Boards of Directors who are accountable to the 'Members' who hold overall responsibility. Directors and Members are locally appointed. The Trust is then answerable to Ofsted, the Education Funding Agency and the Regional Commissioner for Schools. This merger will not introduce a new level of management but generally replicate the current structures. Each group of schools and each phase of education will have representation at Director level.

How will staff be consulted?

A staff consultation is under way with colleagues having the opportunity to discuss the proposed merger with senior staff. The unions have also been informed and will be available to their members to give advice. Staff governors will also be able to represent staff views at local Governing Body meetings.

How will the decision to merge be made?

Following the month of consultation the three separate Boards of Directors will consider the feedback and vote as to whether they agree to the merger in principle. If this is agreed across the Trusts there will be joint work to address any issues raised and to agree the 'due diligence' process. A formal application including a business case will be submitted to the DfE. If the application and due diligence processes are successful/positive the merger will be put into place from September 2016.