

Frequently asked questions

Merger of Knutsford Multi-Academy Trust and Congleton Multi-Academy Trust

What is a Multi-Academy Trust?

A Multi-Academy Trust ("MAT") is a formal collaboration between two or more academy schools.

Schools in a MAT do not need to be the same type of school. For example, primary schools can be in a MAT with secondary and/or special schools.

The board of trustees of the MAT is ultimately responsible for all of the schools within the trust, and trustees are directly accountable to the Secretary of State for Education. However, trusts may delegate a range of decision-making powers to the Local Governing Bodies of the individual academies.

Why would two multi-academy trusts wish to merge?

Through combination two smaller multi-academy trust can generate greater educational and financial benefit in some of the following ways:

- provide a wider range of experiences for children
- share best practice between staff to improve outcomes for children
- be more financially efficient than smaller trusts (for example by centralising services such as finance, HR, payroll, and procurement) and direct any savings made in this way to children and school staff
- focus funds where needed more quickly by working collaboratively
- greater flexibility in staff support and deployment
- achieve more routine access to large-scale funds (e.g. School Condition Allocation) to help schools to improve further and faster
- establish better succession planning programmes.

The government wants to see smaller MATs combine to create more sustainability and impact. They provide funding and technical support to help this happen.

Can you provide more information how things work at the moment?

KMAT

Kmat is a MAT consisting of 4 schools: Knutsford Academy (11 to 19), Cheshire Studio School (14 to 19), Egerton Primary School, and Sir William Stanier Academy (11 to 16). The MAT educates approximately 2,100 pupils.

Knutsford Academy became an Academy in 2012. Cheshire Studio School opened in 2014. Egerton Primary joined the MAT in 2018. Knutsford Academy, Cheshire Studio School and Egerton Primary School are all rated good by Ofsted. Knutsford Academy is experiencing large growth in pupil numbers. Egerton Primary School is oversubscribed. These schools are based in Knutsford. Sir William Stanier joined the MAT in April 2020, and is rated Requires Improvement by Ofsted. This school is based in Crewe.

The MAT provides centralised governance, strategic leadership, finance, HR and payroll and other services to its schools. Each school has a local governing body, which includes parents and others drawn from the local community.

Cmat

Cmat is a MAT consisting of four schools: Congleton High School (11 to 19), Black Firs Primary School, The Oaks Academy (11 to 16) and Castle Primary School. The MAT educates approximately 2,000 children.

Congleton High School, Black Firs Primary School, and Castle Primary School are all rated good by Ofsted, and both Congleton High School and Black Firs are witnessing growth in pupil numbers. These schools are based in Congleton and North Staffordshire.

The Oaks Academy joined the trust in November 2019 as a newly sponsored school and has not yet been subject to an Ofsted inspection under this designation, however the school was previously found to be inadequate by Ofsted prior to joining the Trust. The Oaks Academy is located in Crewe.

Formed in 2014, the MAT provides centralised governance, strategic leadership, finance, HR and payroll services to its schools. Each school has a local governing body which includes parents, staff, and others drawn from the local community, with the exception of The Oaks Academy, which is currently monitored directly by the Trust as part of measures to support this school.

Detailed information about each schools' academic performance with links to most recent Ofsted reports can be found at the DfE's Performance Tables <https://www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk/>

What is the proposed change?

It is proposed that the two trusts combine to form one legal entity. The new MAT would have a single trust board, executive leadership team, and central services team.

The new trust will adopt a single scheme of delegation, which would retain local governing boards, and a commitment to maximising autonomy for schools within the trust, ensuring that intervention is targeted at schools in need of support. As now, our successful schools can continue to thrive in their local communities and will retain their own individual ethos within the broader values that underpin our work.

It is proposed the new trust will be operational from 1 September 2020.

Why is this change being proposed?

Both trusts are currently seeking to grow to achieve more impact on pupil learning and to build financial sustainability. Greater size will increase our ability to provide support to schools. Both trusts share common values and ambition for schools.

These are summarised as:

- We are ambitious for all children – our schools share a commitment to providing world-class education while inspiring children to realise their full potential
- Our schools reflect their communities – each school has the freedom to determine its own ethos within overarching trust goals
- Together we can achieve more – we know that collaboration and working in partnership enriches us all

In addition, the trusts are of similar sizes, have similar schemes of delegation and governance structures, have a mix of primary and secondary schools, are in geographical proximity to one another, particularly in relation to their Crewe schools, and are both financially secure.

Why are we doing this at this time?

We need to secure new leadership for Cmat as soon as we can. The current pandemic has made doing this work challenging but it has also given us some capacity to move at a reasonable pace.

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How will the merger process proceed and what work has been completed to date?

The merger process is being managed by a Project Steering Group of Trustees. It is working through a project plan, which includes these elements:

- Vision and values
- Due diligence
- Governance
- Legal and regulatory
- Communication and consultation
- School performance
- Central services

What will this cost?

We expect that all legal and other costs associated with the merger will be funded through the DfE MAT Capacity Fund. No school will be financially disadvantaged by the merger,

What impact will this have on children and their parents/carers

We do not expect any immediate or discernible impact of children or their parents/carers. However, we hope that many benefits will accrue over time.

Will a school's character, uniform or ethos change because of the merger?

No. These are determined by the school. We want each school to keep its own ethos.

Will teachers and other staff change?

No. Again this is left to individual schools.

What will the new trust be called?

We are working on finding a name that reflects our shared aspirations. Our key considerations in finding a name are ensuring that our individual schools continue to be the 'public face' of the organisation and not the trust. We will keep you updated.

How large will the new trust become?

We are proposing to merge in order to consolidate and improve on our existing strengths. Joining together will make us large enough to be sustainable and have greater impact. We have agreed that any future growth can only occur if it does not detract from the quality of education and care provided in existing schools

When will the proposal become public?

We are already talking to staff and local governing bodies. We will work over the coming weeks to inform local press and others. We will also inform all stakeholders once we know whether the merger will occur.

Who are the people leading the trust?

The same people who lead the existing trusts except for the retirement of David Hermitt from Congleton. We do not expect any other staff changes apart from Mike Cladingbowl, from Knutsford, who will lead the new trust and David Twambley, from Congleton, who will be its Chief Operating Officer.

Mike Cladingbowl has been one of the most senior leaders in education for over 25 years. After success as a secondary school headteacher in Crewe, he was appointed as one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of schools, children's services and skills in 2002. After specialising in school improvement, he worked in senior executive leadership roles for Ofsted, including leading inspection reform in England. He has led Knutsford multi-academy trust since 2015. He is married with two children who attend their local high school.

David Twambley currently leads central operations at Congleton Multi-Academy Trust, in a role encompassing Finance, Human Resources, governance and compliance. A chartered accountant by profession, prior to joining Cmat in 2018 David worked as a senior manager in professional services firms in London and Manchester, supporting academies and educational charities with all aspects of finance and compliance. Originally from Cheshire, David spent 10 years in the South East, studying at Oxford and UCL before working in London, returning to the area following his marriage in 2017.