

Dear Stakeholders,

Equa-Mead Merger Consultation

Over recent months, Paul Skipp and Lyssy Bolton (the CEOs of Equa Multi Academy Trust and The Mead Trust), along with their respective Trust Boards, have been exploring the potential for the two trusts to merge and form a single Trust. We believe this provides an exciting opportunity for our schools, our staff and children, young people and families within the local community we serve.

Equa Multi Academy Trust consists of 2 secondary schools, 7 primary schools and 2 nursery provisions, with a potential secondary Resource Base opening in September. The Mead Trust consists of 3 primary schools split over 4 sites, including 4 nurseries and 2 Complex Needs Resource Bases.

Through an initial phase of exploration, it is clear that there is considerable synergy between the Trusts and that there are different areas of expertise and excellence within both organisations. Equa and The Mead Trust both provide a high standard of education to pupils and have a well-aligned set of values. We prioritise the importance of our communities and share an ambition to do the very best for all children and young people in our care. Both organisations share a strong common ethos and a belief in purposeful collaboration, centred around a 'family of schools.' If a merger proceeds, the joining of the two Trusts would therefore be a partnership of equals, rooted firmly in our existing work and communities.

There is a shared belief that by combining these two successful Trusts, we would create an exciting and dynamic organisation, with considerable strength, resources and expertise to deliver the aspirations and benefits we all seek for all of our children and young people, our staff and wider communities. Creating a larger family of schools would provide even greater opportunities to strengthen the learning and wellbeing of our children and young people, the continued development and wellbeing of staff and the leadership of effective school improvement.

Our Trusts are established in close proximity to each other in Wiltshire. Our current schools are based in two distinct clusters - Lavington and Trowbridge. The schools within each cluster are within a 30-minute drive of each other. We would maintain a geographical hub structure to ensure that maximum benefit is derived from collaborative working, sharing resources and expertise. We also anticipate opportunities for some inter-cluster working, where that would be advantageous.

As part of the process we are launching a listening exercise to gather and consider the views of all stakeholders. Consultation meetings, and the opportunity to submit views, are open from 26 June to 25 July. If you would like to attend an open public meeting to discuss the potential venture please come along to:

Castle Mead Primary School (Mascroft Road, Trowbridge) on Monday 17 July from 7pm - 8pm
Lavington School (Market Lavington) on Wednesday 19 July from 5pm – 6pm

These will run as drop in sessions in order to provide space for questions and answers. If you are not able to attend in person, but would like to make your views known, please complete [a Merger Consultation Form online](#). (There will be additional internal opportunities to meet for existing staff and local governors of both Trusts.)

Both Trusts have coordinated issuing their consultation to ensure we hear from all stakeholders at the same time. As considerations are worked through, we will ensure communication is widely shared and you are fully informed.

With thanks,

Roger Townsend
Chair, Equa MAT

Anne Millin
Chair, The Mead Trust

Paul Skipp
CEO, Equa MAT

Lyssy Bolton
CEO, The Mead Trust

Frequently Asked Questions

What will be the mission?

As now, the Trust's mission will be to give every child every chance of a great education. We will provide inspirational learning for all members of our Trust – children, young people and adults alike – by launching interests, and igniting passions. We will hold children and young people at the heart of all that we do, striving for outstanding quality, and seeking a golden thread in all aspects of our work. We will collaborate and learn together, working ethically and with a generosity of spirit on behalf of each other and all our children.

What are the benefits of merging?

There are expert practitioners and outstanding leaders in both Trusts. Investment in a larger school improvement team will support us to attract and retain high quality staff as well as drive improvement where needed. The sharing of knowledge, skills, expertise and resources will mean we can offer a broader curriculum and enhanced enrichment activities, and the sharp focus of resources on shared needs and priorities will extend the reach of the best teachers and most experienced leaders across the Trust.

Cross-phase working will facilitate a smooth transition from primary to secondary and into post 16 study for children and young people across the Trust's clusters.

A larger Trust is better able to cope with change and uncertainty both in the context of the education landscape and financially. There will be a Trust-wide collective efficacy by streamlining functions, supporting the schools to focus on their core business of teaching, learning and safeguarding. A larger Trust can better utilise resources to support continuous improvement in all schools, and creating a larger trust reduces the overall administrative burden. Every school in the Trust will be stronger by being part of our family of schools.

The Trust will provide support and training for its local governors, who will have regular liaison directly with leaders and the Board via the Chairs Forum. A highly skilled and experienced Board of Trustees with membership drawn from both Trusts will provide strategic direction and oversight, whilst excellent back-office support in Finance, HR, Health & Safety, Estate Management, coordination and marketing will underpin the financial security of being part of a larger organisation.

What will be the benefits to children and young people?

Children and young people learning at a school in the Trust will benefit from the coordination of activities and events across the clusters (such as music festivals, exhibitions, school parliaments, fixtures etc).

A highly effective Improvement Team with experienced primary, secondary, special educational needs and child welfare specialists will ensure our provision is the best it can be, while a sharp focus on meeting the needs of disadvantaged children and young people, and those with additional needs and special talents, will ensure inspirational learning for all.

Children and young people will have the opportunity to participate in Trust-wide groups focused on areas important to them, including sustainability, equality, diversity and inclusion. A larger Trust will be able to offer a much greater range of opportunities to children and young people, both educationally and through enrichment activities.

All children and young people will have potential access to a wider curriculum through increased cultural capital opportunities and there will be opportunities for further collaboration in sport, the arts and learning outside the classroom. Where facilities are available at some schools but not all, we will increase access and opportunities for all.

Will there be further benefits to staff?

A larger Trust offers greater career development opportunities for staff, improving leadership and staff stability and succession planning. In addition, the Trust will benefit from the sharing of knowledge and expertise between leaders, staff and members of the governance community - across the two Trusts there is a wealth of expertise that will benefit all. Staff will have increased opportunities through coordination and collaborative working.

All of our staff will benefit from greater opportunities that include:

- A programme of training and high-quality professional development
- Secondments and career development, including leadership development at all levels
- Membership of Trust-wide Learning Communities and network groups for heads, curriculum leaders, Inclusion leads/SENCOs, non-teaching staff, subject leaders and aspirant leaders
- Training and networking opportunities for specialist staff such as Resource Base, Nursery and Thrive practitioners, ELSAs, and PSAs
- Cross phase groups leading developments in key areas including curriculum development, teaching and learning, assessment, action research, wellbeing and equalities
- Career development, progression and coordinated succession planning
- A commitment to staff wellbeing, including an Employee Assistance Programme
- Access to Leadership development opportunities
- Teacher training programmes for those early in their careers or wanting to develop specialisms
- Collaboration with peer groups across the trust including cross-phase working

If the merger proceeds there will be some changes over time as some of the strengths of each of the current Trusts are shared. We anticipate combining central office teams to create greater resources and increased support for all schools in the Trust. There will not be any staff redundancies as a result of the merger.

Who will lead the Trust?

It is our intention that Paul Skipp (CEO of Equa) would become the CEO and Lyssy Bolton (CEO of The Mead Trust) would become DCE (Deputy Chief Executive). Lyssy and Paul bring extensive leadership skills and experience across early years, primary and secondary.

How will the schools work together?

Schools in the existing Trusts already work in clusters to support each other, and we will continue to use this approach to provide educational benefit, with the schools in each area collaborating on activities such as training, curriculum planning and supporting our children and young people. In some cases, schools will together in their clusters, in other cases it may be beneficial to for schools to work with other schools in the wider Trust.

What about further collaboration and partnerships?

There are already well-developed links between John of Gaunt secondary school, which is already part of Equa MAT, and The Mead Trust. John of Gaunt has been a partner in Collaborative Schools Ltd (CSL, established as The Mead Trust's Teaching School alliance) for more than a decade.

CSL is the Trowbridge alliance of primary and secondary schools in Trowbridge and surrounding areas who work together to provide targeted support, professional development, transition activities and town events (such as Trowbridge Youth Parliament). Naturally, we would continue to encourage and maintain strong working relationships across CSL and with other local partners that offer benefit our staff and children and young people. It is our ambition to be a Trust of choice for other local schools to join. We anticipate that the Trowbridge cluster will grow, building on existing relationships and strong collegiate working across CSL.

Will schools change their names?

No! The names of all the schools will remain the same. Many of the schools have a long and rich history; all have a reputation and value within their local community. We respect that their individuality is represented through their name.

Will schools lose their identities?

No! The special and unique identity of each school is very important and we will continue to recognise and celebrate the history and identities of the different schools as we embrace a larger family of schools. Our schools will be united by a common vision but each will implement the values that underpin their work in the way that best suits their community. The identity and ethos of each school will not be changed as a result of the merger.

What will the legal changes be?

If a decision is made to merge, Equa as the larger Trust would be known as the 'base' Trust, with The Mead Trust known as the 'merging' Trust. All employees from The Mead Trust would join Equa MAT and The Mead Trust Charitable Company would be wound down.

The Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) regulations will apply and staff currently working for The Mead Trust will be transferred, under TUPE conditions. TUPE conditions ensure transferred staff retain their existing terms and conditions.

The existing legal agreements for use of and ownership of the schools' land and buildings will be transferred from The Mead Trust to Equa as the base trust. The protections that ensure that the land and buildings can only be used for educational purposes will also transfer.

What about the church school status of some schools?

The Diocese of Salisbury has been consulted about the potential merger and it has welcomed, and fully supports, these discussions. There will be no changes to the church school status of schools (all currently in Equa) and they will continue as they currently are, being supported by both the Trust and the Diocese.

The merged Trust would fulfil the Diocesan requirements for Foundation governance, as it would be underpinned by Equality Articles of Association which meet all requirements. The Trust will be part of the 'church schools flourishing' programme led by Salisbury Diocese, which will enable support to be given to church schools within the Trust and those who may join in the future. The church school status that some schools have is an important part of a school's individual distinctiveness and it is important this continues to be recognised and supported by the Trust.

What happens next?

Considerable work will be required before the two Trust Boards can formally take the decision to merge and whatever is decided will be based on what is best for the future education of all the children and young people in our schools. Both Trusts will undertake a comprehensive appraisal of the resources, finances and other aspects of the schools in each Trust and the central associated services of each Trust. Once this due diligence has been completed to the satisfaction of both Trusts a final decision about whether to merge will take place, and a business case will be submitted to the Regional Director.

A Merger Steering Committee will be established, comprising the two Trust Chairs and CEOs. The detailed work will be undertaken by a number of working groups, which will bring together expertise from across the two Trusts.

What are the timescales?

We anticipate that the merger, should it take place, would proceed at a point within the next academic year. Progress would be subject to approval from the Regional Director (acting on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education) after scrutiny at the South West Advisory Board.