

Information on the proposed merger of Bedford College Academies Trust (BCAT) and Knowledge Schools Trust (KST)

The Department for Education is advising smaller trusts to grow, to increase effectiveness and sustainability. The increased expectations on schools and trusts, we believe, would be better met by forming a stronger, larger, multi-academy trust, combining our experience, expertise and resources, with [Knowledge Schools Trust \(KST\)](#). We also expect this will lead to improved educational outcomes, as a result of us being able to invest more in our front-line staff and in educational experiences for the pupils in our schools.

Why merge?

The rationale behind the decision to consider joining together is:

- The two Trusts have much in common, share similar values, cultures, pedagogical approaches and are committed to improving the educational outcomes for pupils through a knowledge-rich curriculum.
- Both Trusts are relatively small. BCAT has 2 schools (1 primary school and 1 secondary school) and KST has 7 schools (6 primary and 1 secondary school). All schools are successful, and popular, and both Trusts recognise the importance of maintaining a school's identity and character within the broader boundaries of the trust.
- In the last few years KST has taken on 3 schools, 1 in Central Bedfordshire (Doverly Academy), and 1 on the Bucks/Beds border (Edlesborough Primary Academy) and is in the process of completing the transfer of a school in Bedford Borough (Bedford Road Primary). This proposed merger will enable a hub in the region to support all local schools that are within the merged trust. This will be delivered by existing BCAT central team staff (that have delivered improvements at Wixams Academy and Wixams Tree Primary over the last year) in conjunction with KST central team staff that has a significant track record of delivering school improvement at the primary schools they have taken on in recent years.
- Both Trusts are currently in a robust financial position, and a merger would enable better economies of scale and improved value for money procurement. This would ensure more funding for front line teaching and pastoral services.
- Wixams Tree Primary staff and pupils have benefited in recent months from working in partnership with KST staff on implementing an improved knowledge-rich curriculum, and already enjoy a strong working relationship. However, combining our experience, expertise and resources would enable an even better range of services to our schools and sustain and advance educational excellence.
- All schools within a merged trust would gain an increase in support levels for the same current cost with enhanced access to professional skills and advice. Wixams Academy and Wixams Tree Primary would gain dedicated marketing support, a primary school improvement team (for Wixams Tree Primary), Sixth Form development work with one of the highest achieving Sixth Form Centres in London (for Wixams Academy). KST will



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gain more operational depth of staffing and increased secondary school improvement capacity and increased senior level leadership.

- Due to the consistent, high-achieving, performance of the KST London primary schools and secondary school, the focus will be on support for the Bedfordshire Hub schools, this will release more time to focus on Wixams Academy, and for the KST Primary Improvement team to focus on Wixams Tree Primary.
- Our children and young people would achieve and experience even more as part of a larger family of schools (shared curriculum resources, joint sports days, joint day and residential trips, inter-school quiz/debate competitions, joint revision days for GCSE and Sixth Form).
- Our staff would significantly benefit from greater opportunities for collaboration and professional development within a larger trust with the possibilities of secondments and enhanced career progression. This would enable us to retain staff in future years and help attract new recruits.

What would a merged trust look like and how would the schools feel?

- A challenge of establishing a larger trust is ensuring that the trust takes into account and meets the different circumstances and needs of individual schools, while representing value for money. It would be the role and responsibility of local advisory bodies to ensure this, in partnership with trustees and there is a shared commitment to deliver this goal.
- Some Trustees of Bedford College Academies Trust are likely to join the KST board to ensure representation of local issues. The composition of the BCAT Local Advisory Bodies would not change and their role would be to continue to ensure strong local governance.
- Schools would retain their identity, unique character and school name. There is no intention to create schools that are too similar and parental choice remains important to us. For example, Wixams Academy is a local community school and needs to cater for a wide range of courses at GCSE, A-Level and vocational qualifications.
- The current determined admission arrangements in both schools within our trust would not be affected by this proposal.
- There would be no immediate changes to school uniform as a result of this proposal.
- Our staff would benefit from greater opportunities for collaboration and professional development within a larger trust. Staff would not be compelled to move between schools in the Trust however our aim is for staff to be able to take advantage of a wider range of career and professional development opportunities within a bigger trust.
- Employees would retain the existing terms and conditions of their contract under the merger.
- Based on initial considerations, we would not envisage any significant staffing changes as a result of the bringing together of our two trusts. From a legal perspective as Knowledge Schools Trust is the larger entity, they would be the transferee trust and therefore Wixams Academy and Wixams Tree Primary would be transferred to Knowledge Schools Trust. The merged trust would operate as Knowledge Schools Trust with refreshed branding to reflect the creation of a regional hub in Bedfordshire.

Trust and school finance

- In line with current arrangements, budgets would be devolved to schools. A small proportion of school funding is allocated to fund central services, serving the schools within the trust. The breadth of service support for our schools would increase.
- As part of a larger family of schools, a trust central team would be able to secure greater efficiencies and economies of scale, which will then enable the Trust to provide enhanced services to its schools.

Consultation Phase

This public consultation starts on Wednesday 11th October and will end on Wednesday 15th November 2023. There will be 2 public consultation meetings for parents and local stakeholders on Wednesday 18th October (6-8 pm) and Wednesday 1st November (6-8pm) both at Wixams Academy. We would be grateful if you can come along to share your views and ask any queries you may have on this proposal on either date. Alternatively, you can also email your views to mergerconsultation@BCAT.co.uk. We will also be providing regular updates to our employees during the consultation.

We have directly shared this information with our employees, all existing parents of Wixams Academy and Wixams Tree Primary, local stakeholders (local primary and secondary schools, Bedford Borough Local Authority, Wixams Parish Council, Wixams Residents Association, relevant employee trade unions). It is also published on all three of our websites:

- <https://bctrust.co.uk/>
- <https://wixamsacademy.co.uk>
- <https://wixamstreeprimary.co.uk>

You can learn more about Knowledge Schools Trust here:
<https://www.knowledgeschoolstrust.org>