

## Frequently asked questions

### What is a Multi Academy Trust?

Multi-academy Trusts (MATs) are groups of academies that come together to form a charitable company with a single group of 'members' (who have an overview of the governance arrangements) and a single board of Trustees. Higham Lane School is currently a Single Academy Trust (a SAT).

Even as part of a MAT, the following still applies: -

- individual schools remain as separate entities, with separate names and DfE numbers.
- individual schools still receive separate Ofsted judgements and any published performance tables are still based on individual schools.

The ambition to form a MAT has been part of Higham Lane School's School Development Plan for the past two academic years.

### What is the Department for Education's perspective on Trusts joining together?

The Department is encouraging mergers of like-minded Trusts, particularly local ones, recognising the development of capacity for school improvement across the country.

In a letter to single and small academy Trusts on 17 January 2022, the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) wrote:

*"I wanted to write to you to underscore the Department of Education's ambition, outlined by the Secretary of State in his speech to the Confederation of School Trusts last year, for every school to be part of a family of schools in a strong MAT."*

In addition, the new education white paper 'Opportunity for All' - 28 March 2022, again presents the case for a coherent education system comprised of schools within strong MATs, with the intention that all schools would be academies in Trusts by 2030.

### Why are Higham Lane School Trust and the Central England Academy Trust (CEAT) joining together?

The Trustees of each Trust consider that this is the right thing for both the Trusts for various reasons including:

- The Trusts have shared value and principles.
- The merger of the two trusts is compatible with the Department for Education's vision for schools in the future.
- Opportunities for knowledge sharing and collaboration across the staff of both schools.
- The Schools within the Trust are in close proximity to one another. Evidence would tend to suggest, alongside common sense, that schools will collaborate more effectively when they are close geographically.
- To take advantage of the benefits of being in a larger MAT e.g. economies of scale. For example, as MATs grow, they receive regular guaranteed capital income which allows for additional investment in schools.
- Being a "mixed" Trust (which has schools that cover all aspects of education) would provide additional insight and expertise across the new Trust.

### **What are the benefits of joining the two Trusts together?**

**Benefit to pupils:** As staff further develop their shared expertise and knowledge and understanding of good practice, pupils now and in the future will benefit. All of the benefits below will have a positive impact on pupils.

**Benefit to staff:** Opportunity to work collaboratively and share strong practice across the Trust.

**Professional development and school to school collaboration:** This can be organised across multiple schools, spreading the cost per school and up-skilling as many individuals as possible per session. There can also be more opportunities for teachers and other staff and the overall effect of this is a school's ability to retain its best staff.

**Financial benefit:** Being a larger Trust will help to promote great economies of scale and allow for greater investment opportunities to each of the schools in the Trust. A Trust is able to purchase as a whole, thereby achieving economies of scale not achievable by individual schools. With ever-tightening budgets, this can help schools maintain and build upon the resources and standards they aspire to.

**Power to negotiate:** Being part of a larger group of schools typically results in Trusts and schools negotiating more favourable terms and contracts for external services. Saving money on such expenditure means the school has potentially more budget to invest back into the education of its pupils.

**Power to influence:** A larger MAT brings with it greater opportunities to influence and shape the sector as the number of schools are 'stronger together'.

**Enhanced leadership:** Trustees, leaders and teachers can combine their knowledge and planning abilities to work on challenges and solutions together to enhance knowledge.

**Strategic management:** Trustees and Senior Leadership Team colleagues can draw on each other's experience to further enhance strategic approaches.

**Shared accountability:** As a Trust represents multiple schools, it is in its interest to raise the profile of each, in line with rising expectations. This can be additionally beneficial to a school that needs its profile raising.

### **Will Higham Lane School retain its name and identity?**

Yes, the school will keep its name and identity. The name of the Trust will remain Central England Academies Trust as this is already an existing MAT registered with the Department for Education.

### **Will there be any change to the curriculum and/or education standards for our children?**

Higham Lane School will still be Higham Lane with its curriculum and standards intact. There will be no change to the curriculum except to reflect any changes required by the Department for Education or examining boards for secondary schools as would be made without the merger.

### **What else will it mean for Higham Lane School?**

In terms of the education your child will receive and day to day life at school, you will see very little difference, if any, once the Trusts join together. In time, collaborative working will help to enhance the experience of students.

**When will the new Trust form?**

We intend to join the two existing Trusts together and create the new Trust in the autumn of 2022, although this date is to be confirmed.

**Have the risks been considered?**

Yes. A comprehensive due diligence process has begun with each Trust working hard and in partnership to review all areas and make informed decisions. The Leadership and Executive Teams have also sought external support to ensure a robust and thorough process. Both Trusts are pleased with the outcomes so far of this process and there are no concerns that have been identified that present a risk. The Trustees of Higham Lane School discussed the benefits and risks thoroughly prior to the decision being approved in principle.

**What has happened so far?**

As noted above, both parties are working through a rigorous due diligence process. The proposed merger has been approved in principle by the Trustees of both Trust boards and the proposed merger will now go forward to the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) and Advisory Board for approval.

**How will the Trust be governed and who are the Trustees?**

The merged Trust will have a board of Trustees who will be responsible to ensure the overall strategic direction of all schools. Each school will maintain its own local governing body as they have now.

Both the Trustees and members of the new Trust will be made up of existing Trustees of the current Trusts.