

The Harlington & Sundon Academy Trust



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22nd June 2023

Dear Parent/Carer,

Consultation on joining The Pyramid Schools Trust

Following on from Miss Paulding's letter of the 12th May where we informed you that we were beginning conversations with the Pyramid Schools Trust, we are writing to you to give you more information.

Following rigorous investigation of local Multi Academy Trusts by the Board of Trustees Body and Senior Leadership Team at the Harlington and Sundon Academy Trust, Harlington and Sundon Lower Schools have been working alongside The Pyramid Schools Trust. This collaborative relationship has helped enhance the professional capacity at the Harlington and Sundon Academy Trust.

The Board of Trustees at the Harlington and Sundon Academy Trust are formally considering joining The Pyramid Schools Trust to formalise this collaboration. As member schools, Harlington and Sundon Lower Schools will retain their current names. However, the Harlington and Sundon Academy Trust will officially close and merge into The Pyramid Schools Trust.

Our schools are already successful in their own right and they will retain much of their independence whilst benefiting from being part of the Trust. There will, however, be the opportunity to further improve outcomes by further developing and enhancing the curriculum we offer, sharing best practice and making significant financial savings.

The Harlington and Sundon Academy Trust is therefore consulting on the proposal of merging with The Pyramid Schools Trust.

General information is attached; the vision and values of The Pyramid Schools Trust and the answers to some 'frequently asked questions'. There will also be a consultation event, at Harlington Lower School on **Monday 10th July at 9am and at Sundon Lower School on Monday 10th July at 7pm**. You are welcome to attend whichever time is most convenient to you, regardless of which school you are linked to.

We want to hear your views, which the Board of Trustees Body will consider when making their final decision. If you would like to comment on this proposal, or if you have any suggestions or observations you would like to make, please email governorsclerk@harlingtonlower.co.uk. The consultation period will end on Wednesday 19th July.

We hope the information provided offers clarity about the proposal and the reasons for joining The Pyramid Schools Trust. We look forward to hearing your views.

Yours faithfully,

Mr Tim Kingham
Chair of Trustees

Miss Victoria Paulding
Executive Headteacher



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Frequently Asked Questions

Multi Academy Trusts (MAT)

What is a multi-academy trust?

A MAT is a single charitable company which operates a group of schools. In this case, each school would continue to have a local governing body to which the MAT would delegate certain functions. The MAT would ultimately be accountable and responsible for the performance of all schools in the trust.

Funding for the schools within a MAT continues to be allocated on an individual academy basis. Funding is governed through a master funding agreement between the Secretary of State and the MAT and a supplemental funding agreement for each school within the MAT.

Having a single trust governing all schools results in there only being one employer for all staff which allows the sharing and movement of resources through schools in the chain.

MATs may operate so that, within the parameters of the funding agreement, some of the individual school's budget is combined and used to fund shared services such as contracts. This helps the chain to share best practice and achieve economies of scale.

The Harlington and Sundon Academy Trust is already a small multi-academy trust.

What are the main responsibilities of a MAT?

Typical activities include:

- Setting a strategic direction for improvement of educational attainment.
- Ensuring that the right infrastructure is in place to deliver the necessary changes to support the education improvement (leadership & management).
- Challenging progress in all areas of the schools' operations whilst providing support and guidance aimed at promoting success.
- Responsibility for the performance of the academies, including monitoring and where necessary establishing a plan of action to improve performance.
- Setting up committees with a specific focus to monitor aspects of academy life.
- Leading involvement with parents and the wider community, to promote the MAT and support community regeneration.
- Ensuring value for money and good use of public funds, and leveraging in other finance and resources when needed.
- Championing the MAT in the wider community in order to bring new resources to the schools and the trust, for example through holding events, arranging mentoring and building links with business.



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Why would two multi-academy trusts wish to merge?

Through joining a larger multi-academy trust, such as the Pyramid Schools Trust, trusts can generate greater educational and financial benefit in some of the following ways:

- deliver a better experience for our children
- share best practice and therefore improve outcomes for children and develop staff
- be more financially efficient than smaller trusts (for example by centralising services such as finance, HR, payroll, and procurement) and therefore reduce costs and increase benefits to schools
- focus funds where they are most needed and work collaboratively to meet need more effectively and with greater speed
- have more flexibility in how staff are deployed to benefit schools and to develop staff who wish to progress their careers
- more routine access to funds for school development and therefore help schools to improve further and at faster rates
- establish succession planning programmes and to develop staff and leaders within the new trust

The government is keen to see smaller MATs combine to give sustainability and greater impact.

Can you provide more information about the Harlington and Sundon Academy Trust and the Pyramid Schools Trust and how things work at the moment?

The Harlington and Sundon Academy Trust is a MAT consisting of 2 schools:

Harlington Lower School

Sundon Lower School

The MAT educates approximately 225 pupils. It is governed by a Board of Trustees which works over the two schools.

The Pyramid Schools Trust is a MAT consisting of 5 schools in the local area:

- Westoning Lower School
- Ramsey Manor Lower School
- Arnold Academy
- Parkfields Middle School
- Harlington Upper School

The MAT educates approximately 3,000 pupils. The MAT provides centralised governance, strategic leadership, School Improvement, Finance, HR and payroll, Estates management, and ICT support to its



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schools. Each school has a local governing board, which includes parents and others drawn from the local community.

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 would adopt a single scheme of delegation, which would retain local governing boards. Our current Board of Trustees would become a local governing board across Harlington and Sundon Lower Schools.

As now, our successful schools can continue to thrive in their local communities and would retain their own individual ethos within the broader core values expressed by the trust. This scheme of delegation would reflect existing arrangements.

Why is this change being proposed?

The Harlington and Sundon Academy Trust is currently seeking to merge with another trust to achieve maximum impact on pupil learning and to build financial sustainability and by doing so we believe the educational provision of all pupils can be improved, for the reasons outlined above.

Greater size for the Pyramid Schools Trust should increase the ability of all schools to benefit from those factors, including giving greater educational, financial and organisational support and stability.

Why are The Harlington and Sundon Academy Trust and the Pyramid Schools Trust a 'good fit'?

Both trusts share a strong alignment in a set of common core values and common ambitions for the schools they serve. The Trusts currently serve the same catchment of pupils, and by working together we believe that we can provide an excellent all-through education for our children. We already work closely with the schools in the Pyramid Schools Trust and formalising this arrangement would develop our capacity further.

Can the MAT be forced to take on schools?

No, but it can be requested to do so by the DfE.

Can we leave the MAT if we don't like it?

Both sides should be committed to making the partnership work. At the moment, there is no straightforward process for an academy to leave a MAT. If there were serious issues, we would try to resolve matters with your school and the DfE. We all want what is best for the children in your school. On occasion, some schools have moved from one multi-academy trust to another.



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Consultation

Do trusts need to consult before joining another trust?

Yes. All schools within a trust are required to carry out a consultation, but it is up to them to decide with whom and how to consult. There is no specified length of time for the consultation and schools have flexibility in how it is conducted.

The trust may wish to consult with a range of people and organisations, for example:

- Parents/carers
- School staff
- Local schools and the local community
- Other local trusts
- Local businesses
- Local councillors and politicians

The Governing Body and Governance of the Academy Trust

Who runs the academies and the Trust?

An Academy Trust runs the academies within it, which is the statutory Governing Body. This is a charitable company limited by guarantee. The trust has a formal agreement or contract with the Department for Education (DfE) which sets out the parameters in which it must operate, and is also subject to charity law, public law (being publicly funded), as well as general company law. Each academy within a trust also has its own Local Governing Board.

How would the Academies Trust be governed?

The MAT has a group of Members and a Board of Trustees, and each school would have its own local governing board. However, it has been agreed that Harlington and Sundon Lower Schools would continue with one local governing board across the two schools as this currently works well.

The 'Members' are like shareholders in a commercial company, they appoint the Trustees to run the MAT, and are the only people able to amend the Articles of Association of the Company. The 'Trustees' are those people who actually run, determine policy, and make decisions for the MAT. They are the statutory Governing Body of each academy within the MAT.

How would the role of trustees change if our school joins a MAT?

All academies in a MAT are governed by one trust and a single Board of Trustees.

The Board of Trustees is responsible for decisions relating to how each academy is run, from the curriculum to staffing. The MAT will delegate many of its functions to the local governing board for each of its academies. The MAT remains accountable for these functions.

The Board of Trustees of the Harlington and Sundon Academy Trust would convert to a local governing board. It would continue to carry out many of the functions they already undertake; they would monitor



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and report on outcomes, contribute to setting challenging targets, offer challenge and support to leadership, maintain their role as the link with parents and the community and ensure the sound financial management of the school. They would also be able to spend a greater proportion of their time on 'pupil focused' activities, rather than establishing and agreeing policies and being involved in bureaucratic exercises.

Would the schools keep the same headteacher?

Yes. Harlington and Sundon Lower Schools would retain its current executive headteacher. There is no current plan to change the format of having one headteacher for both schools. There are no current plans to force schools to replace any existing staff members.

The Harlington and Sundon governing body and senior leadership would retain autonomy over how staffing is organised. If, at some point in the future, it becomes apparent that a different way of organising senior leadership is required e.g. a headteacher for each school, it would be considered collaboratively by the Trust and Local Governing Boards.

What about other staff?

As with headteachers, there are no plans to enforce staffing changes on any individual school. Over time, the central operating team of the MAT would be able to carry out some of the functions currently undertaken at school level, which may mean staffing can be reorganised on a school level. Local governing boards and senior leaders would retain the autonomy on how to organise staffing in their schools.

Complaints

Who deals with complaints about schools?

Parents/carers who have a complaint about their child's school would need to contact the school directly. All schools have a complaints procedure and parents/carers are advised to request a copy. There is a Trust level complaints policy which all member schools adopt. However, complaints would only be dealt with by the Trust if they can not be resolved by the Headteacher and/or Local Governing Board.

The local authority has no authority to investigate complaints.

School Names and Uniform

Would the school name change?

No.

Would we all have the same name and logo?

Harlington Lower School and Sundon Lower School would retain their own names and respective logos. However, the MAT has a logo that would be used on all school correspondence.

Would the schools' uniform change?

No.



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Finance

Funding to the schools within a MAT continues to be allocated on an individual academy basis. Funding is governed through a master funding agreement between the Secretary of State and the MAT and a supplemental agreement between the Secretary of State and each school within the MAT.

Each school would pay a proportion of its funding to the Pyramid Schools Trust to pay for central services. The remainder of the funding would remain under the school's discretion as to how to spend it.

What happens with money raised by parents for an individual school?

The money that is raised by parents, members of the community and the school's PTA for an individual school would be retained by that school.

Conversion Process

Land

How would ownership of the land work if we merge with the Pyramid Schools Trust?

We expect most schools should convert very much 'as is' with as little disturbance to existing arrangements as possible. Therefore, where it is considered preferable for existing foundations (such as those at many voluntary-aided schools) holding land to continue to do so, we are in favour of this arrangement provided there are no legal restrictions.

Admissions

Would the admissions arrangements change for our schools?

No. Academies retain the admission arrangements: they are required to comply with the Admissions Code and can only change their admission arrangements following the procedures set out in the Code.

As their own admissions authority, academies are required to consult on their Published Admission Number (PAN) where they propose either to increase or keep the same PAN. This means that:

- The MAT would be responsible for consulting on and determining ('finalising') each school's admission arrangements in accordance with the School Admissions Code.
- The MAT becomes responsible for organising admission appeals in compliance with the School Admission Appeals Code, not the local authority.

Once admission authorities have determined their admission arrangements, they must notify the appropriate bodies and must publish a copy of the determined arrangements on their website, and the website of each individual school, displaying them for the whole offer year (the academic year in which offers for places are made).

The MAT may not decrease the 'PAN' without the consent of the Local Authority (because the Local Authority still has a statutory duty to ensure that it offers enough places for all of its children, so reducing



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your admission to your reception year would prejudice the ability of the Local Authority to meet this statutory requirement).

Would academies have to take part in the local authority's co-ordinated admissions processes?

Academies are required through their funding agreements to participate in the local authority's co-ordinated admission arrangements in the first year of opening.

Curriculum

Who would decide on the curriculum content for our schools?

The MAT has created a cohesive, all through curriculum from ages 3-19. All schools in the MAT play an active role in developing this curriculum and would decide on a local level how best to implement it.

School Improvement Partner

Would individual schools be able to appoint their own School Improvement Partner?

The MAT is developing its own school improvement team. This would be more cost-effective for schools and improve consistency in expectations and monitoring.

Ofsted

Would the MAT be inspected by Ofsted?

Academies are inspected individually by Ofsted using the same framework and timescales as for maintained schools.

Ofsted can also carry out a 'summary evaluation' of the whole Trust.

Please see the DfE website at the following link for more information and to keep up to date:

<https://www.gov.uk/become-an-academy-information-for-schools>