



NEWHAM COMMUNITY
SCHOOLS TRUST



Leading Learning Trust

Newham Community Schools Trust and Leading Learning Trust

Information regarding proposed MAT Merger

January 2022

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Proposal

The following outlines details for the proposed increase in collaboration between Newham Community Schools Trust and Leading Learning Trust.

1. Rationale, Vision and Ethos

Informal discussions about the possibility of a trust merger arose in discussions between the CEOs in 2019/20. These were shared with Chairs of Trust Boards and a Project Group, including Trustees from both trusts and both CEOs, was set up to operate in the summer term of 2021. This has led to the development of this proposal. Underpinning all of these discussions has been the belief of all concerned that:

- Both trusts are committed to providing the highest possible standard of education for young people in our community
- The merger of the two trusts could lead to the development of a sustainable trust which could achieve better outcomes for that community than if the trusts stayed as separate organisations.

As part of its discussions, the Trustees considered what were the key features of the vision and ethos of each trust (the formal statements of these can be found on the trust websites: [NCST](#) and [LLT](#)). The Project Group's view was that there was significant commonality in the ethos and vision of the two trusts and that key elements of the values and vision of a merged trust would include commitment to:

- Maintaining the distinct identity of each school in the Trust
- Inclusive practice and strong pastoral care
- Community focus, engagement - and accountability to local community
- Staff development for all staff
- Broad curriculum with wide range of enrichment opportunities
- Excellent outcomes both in terms of academic achievement and pupil wellbeing
- Principles of subsidiarity and solidarity across the Trust
- High standards of professionalism in all areas - teaching and support, i.e., including HR, Financial management, and governance support.

As part of the rebranding work (below), the above commitments may, through the merger process and in collaboration with the Trust Boards, be turned into concise Vision and Ethos statements and a Trust Mission statement.

It was also noted that the trusts serve the same community, with many pupils progressing from Selwyn and Portway to NCST schools. The Project Group identified the following areas as ones where a merger offered significant opportunities to improve outcomes for students and young people:

- Supporting effective transition for young people from KS2 to KS3
- Sharing effective practice and skills to strengthen the KS2 and KS3 curriculum
- Developing high quality SEND provision, including but not limited to collaboration in strengthening the Hearing-Impaired Resource Provisions at both Lister and Selwyn. This SEND work could also include development of provision through joint purchasing of Speech and Language Therapists
- Enhancing opportunities for enrichment opportunities through sharing resources and facilities
- Enhancing existing work on the Newham Community Music Cluster
- Developing work with families, particular those in need of intervention, with continuity maintained as the child progresses through primary and secondary
- Developing opportunities to pursue sustainable, strategic growth, particularly in the primary phase.

In sum, the Project Group considered that a merger would significantly improve capacity for school improvement, building upon our excellent educational standards through the development of a coherent and continuous curriculum from the primary phase into the secondary. The ultimate aspiration of the new organisation would be to capitalise on the expertise and knowledge of NCST and LLT, two experienced trusts embedded in their communities, to enhance the social, emotional and educational provision of all pupils alongside an increased focus on the support and protection of our most vulnerable children and their families.

The Project Group also considered the wider educational context and noted that:

- Smaller trusts are now being encouraged by the Department for Education to form geographically proximate medium-sized trusts.
- The combined trust would in the judgement of the CEOs be more attractive to other schools considering joining.

In discussing the long-term prospects for growth of a merged trust, the Project Group also noted:

- Representatives of both trusts believed in the value of the focus on the specific community of the western part of the borough of Newham
- Operating at a scale of six or more schools in Newham and as a cross-phase trust would strengthen the Trust's role as a key partner for the Local Authority
- The enlarged trust would be well placed to grow in the short to medium term through expansion in the primary phase
- The enlarged trust would not only have growth prospects through adding further schools but through adding specialist or post-16 provision, adding further to the attractiveness of the trust to parents and staff.
- Enlargement to a medium sized trust (sometimes defined as 8 - 12 schools) had value in terms of sustainability and capacity, but did not jeopardise the commitment to maintaining the distinct identity of each school in the Trust.

2. Due diligence process overview

There are a range of aspects to Due Diligence, and these will be carried out in three different strands, with methodology appropriate for each strand. For all strands we will apply the principles of transparency and confidentiality between the trusts: those involved in the Due Diligence exercise will be given full access to information they need to conduct the exercise.

Strand 1: Educational Standards, including academic achievement, attendance and exclusions data, and Leadership and Management.

Because of geographical proximity and collaboration over time, the two trusts have good knowledge of each other's educational standards. It is proposed that due diligence in this area be conducted through each trust individually preparing a summary for its own Trust Board on the other trust's educational standards and Leadership and Management.

Strand 2: Governance, Compliance and Central Services

The trusts believe that the development of the multi-academy trust requires a comprehensive review of these aspects to ensure that the operating model is appropriate for the scale of the new organisation. These points are therefore to be addressed in full as part of the merger process.

Strand 3: Finance, Contractual Commitments, PFI, Procurement, Asset Management

An external consultant with a high level of expertise in these areas (having done consultancy work for the ESFA) is undertaking due diligence in these areas on behalf of both trusts. This work will include going over projected pupil numbers, with reference to the Local Borough of Newham's place planning projections.

3. Proposed Transition Period

A transition period and transition management team, with a likely maximum duration of 12 months starting from commencement of the new legal entity, will oversee the implementation of the merger. The chair and vice chair of both trusts should be involved, reflecting equity between the LLT and NCST. This proposed transition period is referenced in the following proposal points. The transition management team may take the form of a Working Project Group or the Growth Committee, referenced below, could take on this specific, additional responsibility, or other form. The Steering Group will decide how to manage this.

4. Proposed process for appointment of Trust Board

The newly merged trust's process for appointment to the trust board will be fair and balanced, whilst ensuring there is continuity and stability as the trusts merge. The process will meet the needs of both trusts as currently constituted, whilst also ensuring that the new trust board is established in line with DfE legislation, guidance and best practice and the commitments set out in Articles of Association.

Because of the formal legal position that LLT will be joining NCST, the NCST Trust Board will continue, with the LLT Trust Board being dissolved at the point when the two trusts join.

The Project Steering Group is keen to keep the expertise of LLT's Trustees within the merged trust and seek equity between NCST and LLT Trustees, who will be invited to join the NCST Trust Board. There will be an inclusive approach to the formation of the Trust Board, with all Trustees who are interested in continuing in their role on the reformed Trust Board.

This may result in an expanded Trust Board in the transition period. However, a reduction in the number of Trustees will be achieved over time, reflecting the needs and requirements of the trust.

The Trust Membership will also reflect both LLT and NCST, recognising the partnership between the trusts. In common with a majority of mergers in the sector, the DfE will expect there to be five Members. As the larger and receiving trust, NCST will retain three Members, with LLT Members taking up the two final positions.

In the proposed Scheme of Delegation, as with the current Schemes of Delegation, school identities will be maintained through Local Governing Bodies, and the continuing ability of schools to maintain their distinctive ethos, as underlined by the Curriculum, Teaching & Learning and other key policies remaining the responsibility of individual schools.

5. Proposed Central Services and Management Teams

The Project Group's intention for the trust involves a model of central support working across both the primary and secondary phases for the trust. This should best serve the rationale for merging outlined above and, in particular, should encourage greater efficiencies and cost-saving, greater collaboration across the trust, and a smoother transition for pupils from primary to secondary phases.

The following operating models show a vision of what the central teams may look like. These are not a blueprint, as the trust will need to react to circumstances arising. However, it should provide a guide to a potential effective structure for the newly merged Trust.

Changes of conditions of employment

The Project Group recommends that the following process will be followed for the appointment of the central team:

- The Project Group, with Trust Board approval, will review and define the job descriptions of all central roles, and the appropriate salary level
- Following the merger, the Trust Board will undertake the process for implementation of the new structure
- Where possible and appropriate, substantive posts will be advertised internally to enable members of staff who meet the core requirements of the job description to apply.

This process is to be checked by the lawyers overseeing the merger, once appointed, to ensure that the process is fully compliant, including with TUPE regulations.

6. Moving forward

This merger between NCST and LLT promises considerable opportunities for our staff, pupils, parents/carers and local communities. It is an opportunity to deepen our connections as two trusts with a proud culture of inclusive practice and exceptional attainment, and above all else, an opportunity to improve the lives of the children and young people in Newham who remain at the core of our mission as multi-academy trusts.

Once NCST and LLT have fully merged, there will be a clear impetus and newly strengthened capabilities for us to continue delivering on our aims of providing the highest possible standard of education for young people in our community. With an expanded central team and trust board, alongside even greater diversity across the Trust, we will be in a position to further develop our educational provision for children and young people. By joining together, we can look forward to an improved transition process for our young people as they move from KS2 to KS3, and the sharing of effective practice and skills to strengthen the KS2 and KS3 curriculum. Equally, through expanded facilities and resources, we will be in a position to enhance opportunities for our staff, parents/carers and local community.

As the trust moves forward, we will work together to deliver on our long-term growth prospects. In the immediate outcome of the merger, we will be a medium sized Trust, which brings us significantly improved sustainability and capacity. However, we hope to not only add schools falling under our existing educational offer. Through this merger, we will explore adding specialist and/or post-16 provision to our family of schools; an option that might have remained out of reach without this merger.

Drawing on a wealth of expertise from across NCST and LLT and inspired by the drive and determination from colleagues across our Trust, we have never been so optimistic and ambitious in our outlook for the future.