

CONSULTATION DOCUMENT



The trustees of **Uffculme Academy Trust** and the **The Castle Partnership Trust** are exploring the benefits of a potential merger of the two trusts, to create a single bigger and stronger trust which will look after all of our schools..

Rationale

Uffculme Academy Trust (UAT) and The Castle Partnership Trust (TCPT) have a long and productive history of positive working relationships, sharing of best practice and collaboration across a number of areas to the benefit of all our children. A key strategy for both trusts has been in developing support for vulnerable children and families.

However neither trust has sufficient resource to deliver the quality of support to which we aspire. Together we can achieve this. In addition, we believe that through working more formally together we will create a rich network for teachers to develop resources and learning opportunities that will result in even better education for all our pupils.

By merging the two trusts, we believe that we will, be stronger and more resilient as an organisation, and that there will be even better opportunities for those who work in the trust.

There is considerable synergy between the two trusts which are of a similar size and at a similar stage of development. The founding schools of each trust are outstanding schools and have been leading schools in the South-West for over a decade. Both trusts have considerable strengths in schools which are doing an excellent job in serving their communities and we feel that there is much to gain from working more closely together.



The key points of similarity are:

- Common values, culture and ethos as a 'family of schools' working together for mutual benefit
- Commitment to an inclusive, all-through organisation, based on a powerful understanding of the whole educational journey from 3 – 19
- An understanding of excellence and how to add value to children's educational experiences
- Strong commitment to working with our schools' communities with each school retaining an identity that is reflective of its community
- Strong commitment to being an excellent employer, an 'employer of choice', committed to reducing unnecessary workload and investing in staff well-being, investing in training and providing opportunities for growth and career development.



CURRENT MAKE-UP OF EACH TRUST



Both trusts are mixed phase MATs with primary and secondary schools. There are five nurseries/pre-schools, six primary schools and five secondary schools, one with a Sixth Form. This gives a considerable expertise in all phases of education across the two trusts. There is a significant commitment from each trust currently to its community

with the primary schools all feeding into one of the secondaries and this emphasises the family-centred ethos of all schools.

The Castle Partnership Trust also has experience of free schools, having opened brand new primary schools at both IKB and now Orchard Grove.

The Castle Partnership Trust				Uffculme Academy Trust			
School	Age range	Location	Pupil numbers	School	Age range	Location	Pupil numbers
IKB	2 – 11	Wellington	55	Neroche	2 – 11	Broadway	212
Wellesley Park	2 – 11	Wellington	325	Uffculme Primary	4 – 11	Uffculme	218
Orchard Grove	2 – 11	Taunton	Not yet open	Axe Valley	11 – 16	Axminster	576
Court Fields	11 – 16	Wellington	758	Holyrood	11 – 18	Chard	1327
The Castle	11 – 16	Taunton	1194	Uffculme	11 – 16	Uffculme	1062
			2332				3395



GEOGRAPHY

The schools are situated logically close to one another and are largely positioned around the Blackdown Hills. All schools are currently fewer than 10 miles from their nearest trust school. The longest journey between schools in the new trust would be no further than the current longest journey between schools in Uffculme Academy Trust which is 27 miles (from Holyrood Academy to Uffculme School). Most geographical distances are considerably less.

Uffculme Academy Trust already works across the two local authorities of Devon and Somerset and has positive relationships with officers in both authorities. Both trusts have strong existing networks with other trusts and educational partners around the region including in Devon and Somerset and both employ staff who live between Exeter and Taunton as well as further south and to the north and east of the counties.





POTENTIAL BENEFITS

The merger will significantly enhance school improvement capacity and enable more specialist expertise to be shared across the trust.

Both trusts have trained Ofsted Inspectors who can provide additional support to schools with quality assurance and identifying key areas for school improvement. Similarly both trusts can benefit from the existing expertise in SEND, safeguarding, curriculum development and early years provision within our organisation.

The additional capacity a merger would bring will enable us to expand the school improvement team with more phase and specialist expertise in EYFS, primary, secondary and SEND. Curriculum networks will enable subject specialists to work together and we can build stronger networks of colleagues who have similar roles across both trusts. This will ensure we know our schools really well and can provide support and challenge as needed. Uffculme Academy Trust has a strong teacher training

model based at Uffculme School and a merger would increase our capacity to train, recruit and retain our own teachers. Similarly in aligning the offer for Early Career Teachers we can ensure that the newest entrants to the profession are well supported and receive the best possible start to their teaching careers.

Whilst the Uffculme Trust schools are slightly more spread out than those in The Castle Trust, the addition of schools in Wellington and on the edge of Taunton will make it easier to build more opportunities across the trust for pupils. This could include sporting fixtures, enrichment days, trips and visits and performing arts.

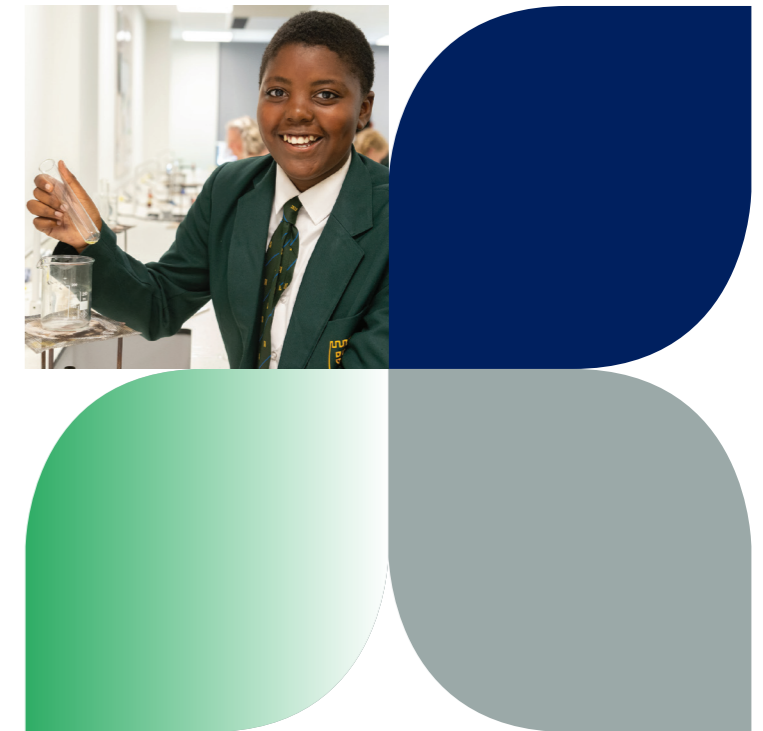
As a 10 school trust, we would still be relatively small in multi-academy trust terms, but we would be better placed to realise economies of scale, secure better purchasing deals and attract other sources of funding. We would also receive guaranteed capital funding for all 10 schools as a bigger trust we would qualify for automatic school condition allocations.



WHAT WILL CHANGE

It is highly unlikely that pupils and families will experience any negative impact from the merger, and the new trust is committed to upholding all current agreements and pay and conditions for all employees. Schools will continue to operate exactly as they do now. There will not be any changes to the admissions arrangements due to the merger, day to day operations nor to terms and

conditions of employment of staff. Staff will continue to work at the school in which they are employed and the new trust is committed to the principle of not moving staff around unless they wish to move. The new Trust will have a new name that reflects the values, ethos and commitment to our local communities, and will have new branding. These will be developed through the process.



WHAT NEXT



This consultation is the first step in the process of deciding whether the proposed merger is the right decision for both trusts and all our schools. We want to hear the views of our staff, families and their local communities. At the same time we will start a process of due diligence examining all the aspects of both trusts that are important to consider when trying to bring two organisations together as one.

We need to make an application to the Department for Education for permission to go ahead and then, having considered all of the evidence in front of us – including the outcomes of this consultation, each board of trustees will make a final decision on whether to proceed on behalf of their schools. Only when both trusts are fully confident

that it is the right decision will the proposed merger go ahead. The earliest this could happen is September 2023. We have set up a mail box at each trust to receive any comments in relation to the proposed merger.

These are:

**consultation@uat.ac
(for Uffculme Academy Trust)**

and:

**consultation@castle.somerset.sch.uk
(for The Castle Partnership Trust)**

Consultation will end at 12.00 on Monday 27th February 2023



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