

2nd June 2025

Outcomes of stakeholder consultation on the proposed merger of The Four Stones Multi Academy Trust and Shropshire Gateway Educational Trust

1. Background

Over the last few months there have been ongoing collaborative discussions between The Four Stones Multi Academy Trust (FSMAT) and Shropshire Gateway Educational Trust (SGET) about further developing our relationship and bringing the two Trusts together. We therefore consulted with all stakeholders about a formal merger between FSMAT's three schools and SGET's four schools to form a new merged multi-academy trust.

A decision, in principle, has been made by both Trusts that a merger would be beneficial, and we thus consulted with staff, governors, parents and other key stakeholders.

2. Impact of the merger

The following was made clear in the consultation materials:

- a. That the merger would bring the following benefits:
 - Improved school improvement support
 - Financial benefits and efficiencies
 - Improved capacity and operational support that will allow our leaders to lead
 - Improved breadth and depth of staff development
- b. Both Trusts see a merger as an opportunity to form a genuine partnership that brings together primary and secondary expertise that has real experience and capacity to support and develop a rich educational provision for children and young people from ages 2-18 in South Shropshire, North Worcestershire and Evesham areas; the strength of this all through provision impacting positively on staff and students alike in all of our current schools.
- c. The new Trust would contain 3 primary schools (Clee Hill Community Academy, Cleobury Mortimer Primary School and Stottesdon CofE Primary School) and 4 secondary schools (Haybridge High School, King Charles 1 School, Lacon Childe School and The De Montfort School) and would be responsible for the education of more than 4300 children and young people from ages 2-18 and employ over 600 staff.
- d. The new Trust would continue to support wider system development through the Haybridge SCITT, the Haybridge Teaching School Hub and as primary lead for the SHaW Maths Hub (based at Cleobury Mortimer Primary School).

- e. Trustees and leaders from both organisations are ambitious for this expertise and provision to be available more widely through other local schools either joining the new Trust over time or through accessing our significant combined CPD contributions with the SCITT, Teaching School Hub and Maths Hub.
- f. The two Trusts are significantly aligned in vision and values, determined to retain the family feel of both Trusts and to provide excellence rooted in the local communities they serve. In addition, both Trusts are committed to providing opportunities, encounters and experiences for children and young people through working with organisations and businesses in the local area and through collaborative Trust wide student projects. Our geography, in our rural and semi-rural settings allows for this to be a realistic possibility
- g. The new Trust will undoubtedly benefit in terms of economies of scale and be stronger together financially. For example, by having 7 schools, we will be able to access annual buildings' funding (known as school condition allocations - SCA) to allow for better strategic planning. The new Trust's central team will have affordable capacity and expertise to support headteachers and school leaders to continue to focus on quality teaching and learning provision in classrooms and support for children and young people.
- h. It is important to stress however that, if we finally decide to merge, school life on a day-to-day basis will continue relatively unchanged. For example, the individual schools will retain their names and uniform and particular ethos; it is of paramount importance to us that each school retains its identity, whilst benefiting from being part of a strong multi-academy trust. Each school's headteacher and senior leadership team will continue to have a crucial role in driving the vision, strategy and ethos both within their own schools and collectively across the new Trust.
- i. In a merger situation, staff terms and conditions will remain the same as covered by TUPE -Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) regulations arrangements. As you know, we seek to ensure that every decision that we make is in the best interests of the children, young people and staff, striving to provide all the best possible opportunities and that is the overriding objective being sought through the proposed merger of the Trusts.
- j. There will be an overarching Executive Team and a single board of Trustees which will govern the Trust with the support of the existing schools' individual local governing bodies/local academy boards.

3. Consultation Process

- a. The consultation period ran between 1st May 2025 and 2nd June 2025.

- b. Letters were sent to all parents/carers and staff of schools in both Trusts, which included a [link to a set of 'Frequently Asked Questions'](#) on the Trusts' respective websites.
- c. Notifications were placed on both [FSMAT's](#) and [SGET's](#) websites.
- d. A note was also sent to the key contacts at the local authorities where FSMAT and SGET operate. See Appendix A for a full list of stakeholders consulted with.
- e. Feedback from stakeholders were also received via an [online consultation form](#).
- f. 'Drop-In' sessions were held for staff and parents/carers on:

Date	Time	School	Who
Wed 7 May	3.30 – 4.00pm	Stottesdon CofE Primary School	Staff
Thurs 8 May	3.30 – 4.00pm	Haybridge High School	Staff
Thurs 8 May	5.30 – 6.00pm	Haybridge High School	Parents/carers
Tues 13 May	3.30 – 4.00pm	Cleobury Mortimer Primary School	Staff
Tues 13 May	5.30 – 6.00pm	Lacon Childe School	All SGET Parents/carers
Wed 14 May	3.30 - 4.00pm	King Charles I School	Staff
Wed 14 May	5.30 – 6.00pm	King Charles I School	Parents/carers
Mon 19 May	3.30 – 4.00pm	Clee Hill Community Academy	Staff
Wed 21 May	3.45 – 4.15pm	TDMS	Staff
Wed 21 May	5.30 – 6.00pm	TDMS	Parents/carers
Thurs 22 May	3.30 – 4.00pm	Lacon Childe School	Staff

4. Consultation feedback from drop-in sessions:

a. Four Stones Schools' Staff meetings:

- i. **Haybridge:** the meeting was attended by Mark Pollard, Nicola Stanfield and Charlotte Mondon Lines. No member of staff attended the meeting. A member of teaching staff 'passed through' the staff room and asked a question about whether there would be any redundancies in the central team.
 - **RESPONSE:** There are no planned redundancies as part of the merger; cost savings will be made from savings in reviewed SLAs and contracts.
- ii. **King Charles:** the meeting was attended by Mark Pollard and Ruth Allen. 20-25 members of staff attended, as it was the first half of a CPD session that was

directed time, although it had been made clear it was voluntary to attend. 3 questions were asked with regards to:

- Curriculum collaboration
 - RESPONSE: Four Stones schools currently collaborate on curriculum design. It is hoped Lacon Childe colleagues will benefit over time from being part of this important networking opportunity.
 - The impact a church school in the Trust would have on KC1
 - RESPONSE: There will be no impact on KC1 local governance, leadership or practice because of the presence of a church school within the new Trust
 - The requirement for Directors of Subject in supporting more schools
 - RESPONSE: We will use the resource to support all schools within the new Trust.
- iii. **TDMS:** the meeting was attended by Mark Pollard and Anna Allen. 6-8 members of staff attended as part of their normal school-based staff forum. 1 question was asked with regards to:
- Clarification about staff working in other schools (there seemed to be a misconception that this was changing).
 - RESPONSE: Staff working in a current SGET or Four Stones schools will not have their place of work changed, unless this is mutually agreed (i.e. a new opportunity arises). Some central colleagues will be required to work across more schools, but this impacts very few staff.

b. Four Stones Schools Parent/Carer meetings:

- i. No parents/carers attended the sessions scheduled in the 3 schools.

c. SGET Staff meetings:

- i. The meetings at **Stottesdon, Cleobury** and **Clee Hill** were attended by Katie Jones and Mark Pollard. Sarah Desborough and Ceri Little (respective Headteachers) attended the Cleobury and Clee Hill meetings. The meetings were well attended by teaching staff in the schools, with one or two support staff. These meetings were quite similar and focused on discussion on the following topics:
 - The opportunity and capacity for collaboration that the new Trust would bring for Primary colleagues
 - The economies of scale and cost-saving benefits for schools

- The combined shared/central services capacity and the aspiration to better support schools with expertise
 - General conversation and interest about processes and structures within The Four Stones MAT
- ii. **Lacon Childe:** the meeting was attended by Katie Jones, Mark Pollard, Ruth Allen and Stuart Weston. 25-20 members of staff attended. Mark and Katie presented briefly on:
- Ensuring Lacon Childe strengths and ‘special culture’ would be preserved
 - The process SGET Trustees completed to select Four Stones as the preferred partner
 - There were no further questions on these matters.
 - Discussion and further questions centered on the following topics:
 - Curriculum alignment and the extent to which it would be a requirement for Lacon Childe colleagues to follow the Four Stones collaborative curriculum
 - Teaching and Learning and the ‘best bets’ practice that the Four Stones promote
 - Collaboration and the opportunities for colleagues to work with other secondary experts
 - The structure and process for combining the central teams
 - Cost saving benefits, the timescales and scope of where savings might be made

5. Consultation feedback from online consultation form:

Respondent	Responses
Support staff	2
Teaching staff	1
Parent/Carer	7
Governance	1
TOTAL	11

- a. In regard to 'wider system development', 'expertise and provision' and 'significant combined CPD contributions', reference is made to the SCITT, Teaching School Hub and Maths Hub. What opportunities are being created for the development of student support systems, SEND provision and Pastoral provision systems, and for the CPD and career development of support staff, who work in tandem, and with expertise, with teaching staff, to ensure the best outcomes for the young people in our care?

- RESPONSE: It is hoped the new merged Trust will have a real focus on CPD as a driver of school improvement, including for support staff, with plans for appraisal processes to be based around professional development. Current Pastoral/SEND Networks will be expanded to support greater collaboration in these areas. The Teaching School Hub provides significant free CPD in areas such as SEND, disadvantaged provision and attendance. This will continue.

- b. Arguments are being made for economies of scale but why is this partnership happening? The scales aren't that much more different with the little addition this is. What is the other MAT bringing to the table that we are not able to do already? You say our day to day will not be affected so why do this when no benefits? Feels like an excuse to just award a select few even more money for not making any meaningful benefit to us in improving or helping our students. My understanding of the MATs purpose was to share expertise and best practice. I feel with changing MAT leadership our purpose has lost direction. I feel some people in charge are too business minded and care only about their £££ trying to absorb all the competition for the sake of it with no benefits to the teachers / students or school. How much money will be spent on rebranding following this? Will we get our school logo replaced again with no consultation if we want the change?
 - RESPONSE:
 - i. SGET have a particular strength in primary provision. This expertise will also benefit secondary colleagues, as well as form the foundation for potential further primary growth.
 - ii. There will be no pay rises for leaders as a direct result of the merger.
 - iii. The new, larger Trust will be able to make savings in reviewing all SLAs and contracts.
 - iv. Effective organisations, including Trusts, need to have sound financial expertise in order to provide efficient education for all the children and young people within the schools.
 - v. Leaders are mindful of the costs of branding and marketing and are conscious to keep any amendments to a minimum.

- c. How will it effect the support SEND provides?
 - RESPONSE: There will be no changes to the provision either in the bases at Lacon Childe School, King Charles 1 School or Cleobury Mortimer PS. Mainstream provision will not change because of the merger. We hope to enhance expertise through more sharing of better practice across phases.

- d. I am opposed to the merger. In my experience multi-academy trusts do not put the interests of pupils or staff at the forefront of decisions. This is evident in the consultation letter which focuses on a benefit of cost-saving. Schools and teachers should be able to have the autonomy and independence to make decisions based on what is right for their individual pupils, not on what is best for the academy trust which represents multiple skills, often with diverse needs.

- e. As the smaller trust it seems concerning that Shropshire Gateway only has 1 drop in event available to parents, will this be a continuing theme that the larger schools are prioritised?
 - RESPONSE: The schedule of meetings reflected the location and size of the parent/carer populations and the workload of leaders. There is no suggestion that smaller schools will be overlooked in the new Trust, quite the opposite. We will create a new position of Director of Primary to oversee the collaboration across these schools.

- f. We are hearing all the good points about this proposal but everything you do also have consequences? So I feel we also need to be made aware of all the pros and cons to this move? We have started off with 4 relatively small rural schools and we will be joined by bigger schools will our rural schools get overlooked by the larger schools?
- RESPONSE: There is no suggestion that smaller schools will be overlooked in the new Trust, quite the opposite. We will create a new position of Director of Primary to oversee the collaboration across these schools.
- g. I believe the merger could bring significant benefits to the school in shared resources but want to understand the new structure better and how governance will be dealt with in the new structure.
- RESPONSE: There will be no changes to local governance. Over time, we will review how to make local governance really effective in the context of a medium-sized Trust. Leaders and Trustees are committed to the importance of local advocacy for schools within their communities, without creating significant workload for school leaders.
- h. Questions are well answered in the document and seem to suggest it makes sense given the bigger picture. I would be disappointed to see additional layers of management or "business development" within the new trust rather than an emphasis on teachers and support staff but this isn't hinted at. I would like to know that it is pushed forward with the support of most of the staff - if they are for it then I think it is likely that morale will stay high. The link with an Evesham secondary seems a bit of a random choice for Cleobury.
- RESPONSE: There are no plans for extra tiers of management. All schools are within approx. 1 hour distance of each other and are accessible to key central staff. The vast majority of schools are within 30 minutes or so (or less), including Haybridge High School which will be the direct 'secondary partner' for Lacon Childe school. We do not see the distances involved as a barrier for collaboration and networking.

6. Next steps

The outcomes of this merger consultation will be shared with the Trustees of both Trusts to assess whether any changes or further communication are necessary. The outcomes will also be shared with the Department for Education (DfE) for their approval for us to proceed with the proposed merger.

If the merger is approved by the Boards of Trustees of FSMAT and SGET, as well as the DfE, the merger will proceed which will include a formal staff TUPE consultation process for FSMAT school and central staff.

Appendix A - List of Stakeholders consulted

- All staff at FSMAT schools (inc. school union reps)
- All central FSMAT staff
- All staff SGET school (inc. school union reps)
- All central SGET staff
- All local governors at FSMAT schools
- All local governors at SGET schools
- All parents/carers at FSMAT schools
- All parents/carers at SGET schools
- Fiona Gibson, Chair of Hereford Diocesan Board of Education
- Gemma Martin, Director of Education, Hereford Diocesan Board of Education
- Nigel Huddleston, MP for Droitwich and Evesham
- Mark Garnier, MP for Wyre Forest
- Bradley Thomas, MP for Bromsgrove
- Stuart Anderson, MP for South Shropshire
- Sarah Wilkins, Assistant Director Education, Worcestershire County Council
- Rachel Kiernan, Group Manager for Education Sufficiency and Place Planning, Worcestershire County Council
- David Shaw, Assistant Director of Education and Achievement, Shropshire Council
- John Rowe, Head of Education Quality and Safeguarding, Shropshire Council