



MAIDEN ERLEGH
TRUST



BERKSHIRE SCHOOLS
TRUST

Merger Frequently Asked Questions

Maiden Erlegh Trust and Berkshire Schools Trust are working together with a view to merging our organisations to become a single Multi Academy Trust (MAT) and the combined organisation will be called Maiden Erlegh Trust.

We believe that this is a very exciting development, which will bring together two groups of talented and dedicated professionals, all striving to provide the best education for the pupils and students in our care. It will also build on our existing mutual and separate relationships with families and groups in the East Reading community, and with the professionals and organisations working with them and for them.

Joining together will enable us to pool expertise, strengthen systems, build capacity and combine resources, in the context of an all-through education offer. We will be focused on raising standards even further for all our pupils and students, developing the talents and skills of staff and ensuring a happy and positive school environment for all.

We believe this merger will be a success because of our shared values of inclusiveness and equality, aspiration, personal development and independence. This includes ensuring that the focus on Christian values and education will be maintained for the BST church schools. Most of all, we have a shared moral purpose of putting children first, a significant part of which is supporting and developing the staff who work with them.

We are hoping to finalise the merger by the start of the new academic year in September 2021. The process will begin with a formal consultation with our respective communities, and the final decision on whether the merger proceeds rests with the Regional Schools Commissioner.

To support this consultation, we have prepared the following Frequently Asked Questions which we hope will answer the majority of your questions.

MULTI ACADEMY TRUSTS MERGER PRINCIPLES

What is a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT)?

A MAT is an education charity, run by educational specialists. MATs are responsible for running a group of publicly-funded academies (schools) working collaboratively with a shared vision and moral purpose, in order to improve and maintain high educational standards for all its pupils and students.

Underpinning this is our Maiden Erlegh Trust motto: *“schools for the community, schools as a community”*.

MATs contribute towards building a strong and sustainable wider education community by sharing expertise and best practice, and also by training, developing and nurturing teachers, support staff and leaders.

Why do MATs merge?

MATs merge for a number of reasons. Underpinning our decision to merge is a shared moral purpose and vision of what the children who attend all the schools in the Trust will have achieved by the time they move on to the next phase of education or work.

Furthermore, by forming a larger organisation, there are increased opportunities for wider collaboration, stronger school improvement, greater consistency and equity for pupils/students and staff, more effective pastoral and inclusion support and financial economies of scale.

What happens to the different organisations when MATs merge?

When two MATs propose to merge, it is on the understanding that one of them will cease to exist as a legal entity. Under our proposal, the Berkshire Schools Trust organisation will cease to exist as a legal entity and the individual schools, along with all staff, assets and property will become part of Maiden Erlegh Trust.

Is there a set model for how a MAT has to operate?

Whilst there is legislation regarding how a MAT is funded and held to account, the way in which a MAT operates, its governance structure, vision and ethos is determined by the Board of Trustees and the Executive Leadership of the resulting organisation. In order to support a smooth transition, and to ensure that the interests of both organisations are represented, a Joint Steering Group has been established to work on the merger together.

How are merged MATs held to account?

MATs and their leaders are held to account through regular meetings with the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Department for Education.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) ensures that funding is used appropriately and that MATs provide value for money through the requirement to publish independently audited annual report and financial statements.

All schools within a MAT are subject to reasonable internal quality assurance processes. Externally, they are inspected by Ofsted, and must comply with the same rules as other schools on special educational needs, exclusions and admissions.

Once above a certain size, the MAT as a whole can also be subject to an evaluation process through Ofsted.

Should the proposed merger proceed, Maiden Erlegh Trust will be the responsible body for the following schools:

Maiden Erlegh Trust	Berkshire Schools Trust
3 Secondary Schools	3 Primary Schools
1 Primary School	
1 Special School	
1 Alternative Provision College / Pupil Referral Unit	

Furthermore, Maiden Erlegh Trust are currently developing two new schools in the local area. River Academy, scheduled to open in 2023, will be a secondary school in Reading. Oak Tree School, scheduled to open in 2022, will be a special school supporting the families of Reading and Wokingham.

BERKSHIRE SCHOOLS TRUST MERGING WITH MAIDEN ERLEGH TRUST

Why do we want to merge?

We anticipate there will be many mutual benefits including:

For pupils and students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared ambition supported by tried and tested structures, leading to improved standards for all. • Sharing of expertise and good practice that will ensure there is consistency and equity of experience and professional challenge and support across the schools. • Access to shared and centralised inclusion expertise and services (eg: counselling, SEND). • Access to activities with other schools eg: sports, arts, support for Year 6 transition to secondary school.
For staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wider opportunities for professional development, coaching, research and our annual Trust CPD Conference. • Partnership and collaboration on key issues eg: curriculum, assessment, safeguarding. • Potential to gain different experiences across the Trust (eg: in different settings/phases, delivering CPD, participating in peer reviews and supporting a wide array of projects. • Benefit of experience and knowledge from primary, secondary, special and AP providers and their partners.
Capacity and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central Services provided more economically eg: Legal and Governance, HR, Finance, Estates, IT and Catering. • Greater purchasing power for contracts leading to lower cost and increased efficiency. • Central School Improvement Team to support development and ensure consistency to highest common denominator for all pupils/students.
Wider community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The merged Trust will have considerable experience working in the Reading community and closer collaboration can only help fine-tune our support for children and their families in the local area. • Expansion of Trust networks and professional Groups. • Access to Teaching School programmes eg: teacher training, Early Careers Teacher support, leadership programmes.

Why are Maiden Erlegh Trust and Berkshire Schools Trust a good fit?

Shared values

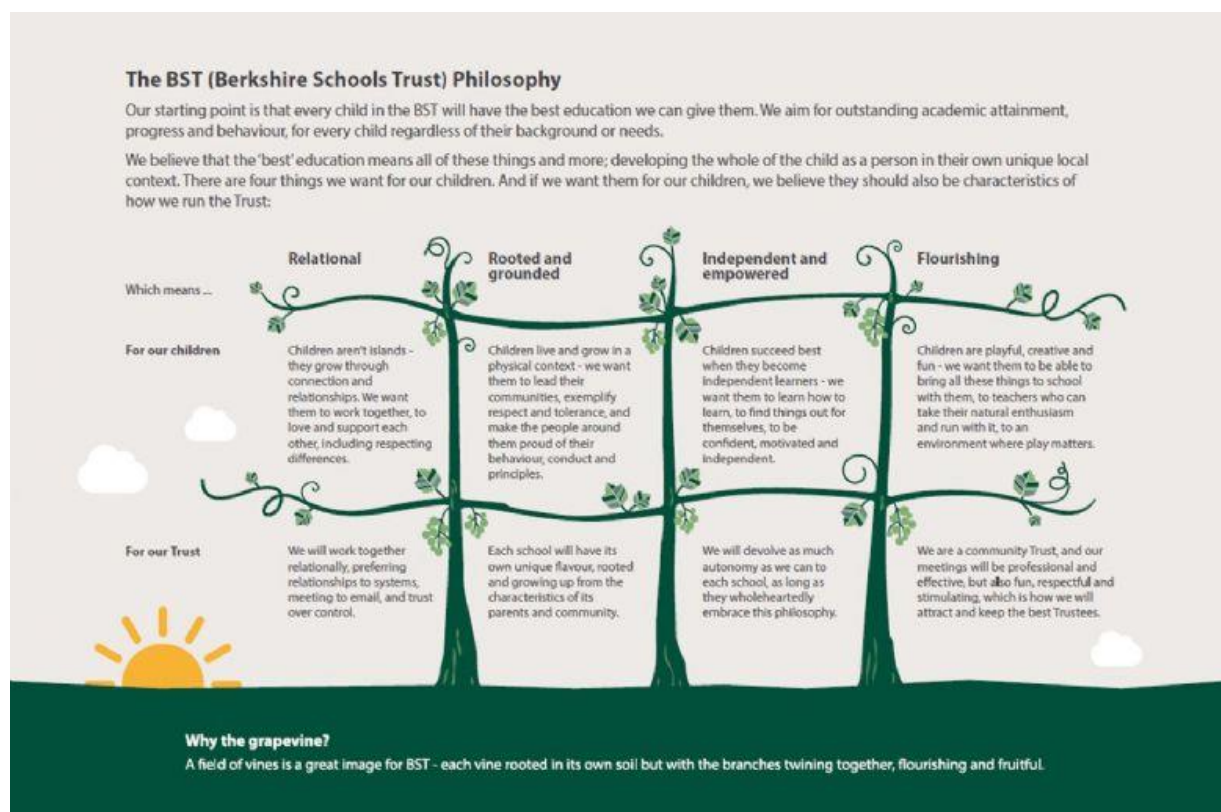
We have shared values on which to build and develop this union. The aim is that every school in the Trust will embrace these values and many of our ways of working, but remain firmly rooted in its own community, serving their families' and children's needs in ambitious and bespoke ways. This will allow BST's church schools to maintain their focus on Christian values, within a wider family of schools.

Key features of Maiden Erlegh Trust values:

Schools for the community, schools as a community

- ✓ Maiden Erlegh Trust aims to build a **community of schools in which a community ethos prevails** in order to nurture, challenge and celebrate young people.
- ✓ In this context we actively promote **mutual respect, equality, an understanding of other cultures, empathy with the wider world and a strong and collaborative work ethic**.
- ✓ Our priorities for each school in our Trust are the education, well-being, happiness and personal development of every pupil/student in our community.
- ✓ Each school which comes into the Trust takes on the goal to be “**a school of opportunity, diversity and success for all**”.
- ✓ Each school will ensure its pupils/students develop socially and thrive personally as well as academically. We want them to become **confident and articulate children and young adults, motivated by a strong sense of personal worth, respect for others and commitment to service to others and hard work**.
- ✓ In order to do that we provide a calm, well ordered, secure and caring community; one which **values as much the effort, participation and contribution to the community during their studies, as the end results**.
- ✓ We understand that **education does not only happen in classrooms and so** the curriculum in each school is designed to provide opportunities to extend learning and personal development.
- ✓ Pupils/students develop the skills they need to become **highly effective and positive citizens, employees and employers in an ever changing and complex world**.

Key features of Berkshire Schools Trust values:



Individuality and Identity

Whilst all member schools must espouse our values and standards, a key principle of the Trust is that member schools maintain their own character and community links.

We have a common commitment to developing the whole individual, (which means being as focused on the emotional and social growth of the child as their academic development), being ambitious and establishing safe, happy, inclusive and respectful cultures.

Each school espouses these values in their work, whilst retaining their community individuality. We do not intend to change this as a result of the merger:

- St John's CE Primary School has a strong ethos of "*everyone matters*".
- New Town Primary School believes in "nurturing brilliance and inspiring ambition".
- New Christ Church CE Primary School talks of being a large "*family*".
- Great Hollands Primary School's experience is framed by "*thinking and learning together; achieving forever*".
- Cranbury College welcomes families and pupils/students with the mantra "*your future starts here*".
- Hamilton School's aim is to be "*a place of education, growth and opportunity*" for all its students.
- Our secondary schools' work is underpinned by our school motto "*opportunity, diversity and success for all*".

In practical terms there will be very little visible change in the way that schools operate following a merger. Over time changes tend to happen organically as collaboration and partnerships take root.

Shared partners and systems

We know that there are also a range of things we have in common which will help the process of uniting eg:

- Close working with Brighter Futures for Children
- Use of therapeutic strategies.
- Links to English Hub, Teaching School
- Use of programmes such as Read Write Inc
- Common Management Information System

Harmonising policies and procedures

There are many advantages of having common policies and procedures: it reduces workload and costs, ensures clarity and fairness and helps develop consistency of high standards and expectations.

Many of the statutory policies will be largely the same as they will be based on agreed models. Where there are differences, we will work with the respective schools to support transfer and/or to adapt implementation for their specific setting. An example of this might be the Behaviour Policy, the principles will be consistent across similar schools but its application may look different.

Strategic Vision

The Maiden Erlegh Trust strategic plan has five key strands which frame its goals for the next three years.



As part of the initial process, we will work together to establish the strategic priorities for the individual schools and how being part of this larger Trust can help them with their school improvement work – through support, facilitating the sharing of great practice and celebrating the achievements of individuals and groups.

Have we considered the risks to the schools?

Neither organisation would embark on a proposal such as this if it were not clear that it would benefit all the children. Transparency and communication are key to success in this area. For this reason we have already started to establish very positive partnerships at Trust and school leadership, Diocesan and Board levels and will undertake a thorough due diligence process.

All schools recognise that the school staff teams should focus on their pupils/students on their roll, ensuring excellent standards and achievements are built upon year on year, but also that the experience of learning and working in the schools is happy, safe and stimulating. As such, we will ensure that as much as possible is undertaken centrally to allow them to prioritise this work and links with their communities.

As part of a MAT, however, there is also a collective responsibility for all pupils and students so that no school is left behind. We work very closely with Headteachers to identify strengths and areas for development and then determine how best to provide and/or source appropriate support.

Both organisations have experience of bringing schools and teams together, and we will use this experience to ensure that communication, training and support is put in place proactively.

The Joint Steering Group, and then the Trust Board of the resulting organisation, will ensure that specific risks are identified and managed appropriately. The Trust and school leaders will collaborate to support the operational side of the merger.

Will working with other schools mean lowering our own standards or possibly detracting resources from our own school?

There is a great deal of expertise in the combined MAT, and where schools are being supported to improve, they do so rapidly.

Schools within the MAT will support each other to raise standards, so reduced standards or poor Ofsted gradings should not happen. If it does happen, however, then there will be a network of support already in place to support and resources will be allocated in inverse proportion to success.

School development is a reciprocal process and in our experience, even the schools with the greatest challenges have skills and expertise that can be harnessed for the greater good. We want to raise the standards of provision and experience to the highest common denominator and we will ensure that strengths and experience are shared across the schools.

Will there be automatic admissions from the primary schools into Maiden Erlegh Secondary Schools?

The Maiden Erlegh School in Reading admissions policy currently lists the three Berkshire Schools Trust primary schools as feeder schools and this will not change as a result of the merger. All schools are required to consult upon, and publish, their own admissions policy which sets out the criteria for admissions. These criteria have regard to the National Admissions Code of Practice and there are no current plans to change the admissions criteria for any of the schools as a result of the proposed merger. Secondary school transfer will continue via the Common Admissions Form.

Will parents still have a say in how the schools should be run?

All the schools are committed to our community values and this includes working with parents. Joining together ensures that our ability to promote our values and high standards is strengthened.

As part of Maiden Erlegh Trust there are formal ways to feed into school improvement eg: through our annual surveys or by formal feedback at after school events (eg: information events). In addition, there are more personalised ways, by contacting the Headteacher or class teacher. In some cases, parents also like to participate in school life though involvement in governance or parents associations, and we would encourage this.

What happens to the individual PTAs and Friends organisations?

Each school retains their own parents' association and fundraising ideas. We can imagine some great opportunities for joined up events and ideas in the future, however!

Will the merger change the names of the schools?

There are no plans to change the names of any of the schools as a result of the merger.

Will the times of the school day and holidays change?

There are no plans to change the times of the school day. Any future changes to the school day would be subject to consultation with parents and carers.

Each school determines their term dates and training days ensuring that there are 190 days in total. We endeavour to remain in line with Reading dates as far as possible and the Trust has two common training days that all schools must keep.

What will happen to the uniform?

Parents and carers would always be consulted if changes were to happen but there are no plans to change current school uniforms.

Will my child still get the same support?

All children with particular needs will continue to receive the support put in place by their schools, and we will continue to work with the local authority and other agencies to get the best possible support for children.

Will there be any curriculum changes?

Maiden Erlegh Trust has common overriding principles for curriculum design and delivery.

Whilst there is no intention to impose prescriptive curriculum plans (unless there is a major need to do so), strong cross-Trust collaboration means that a great deal of harmony in curriculum models develop over time. The result of this is that planning materials, resources and indeed staff can be shared more easily, and workload reduced. It also reduces inconsistencies and inequities which have negative impacts on standards and the experience for pupils and students.

We will provide formal coaching and networking opportunities, and informal links with colleagues in other schools, coordinated by our Director of Standards and Continuous Improvement (DOSCI) and our Executive Headteacher Primary. This ensures that best practice is shared, and that work is not replicated in different settings.

One aspect of the curriculum where we would expect harmonisation is in terms of assessment and target-setting. We would facilitate discussions with all our primary colleagues to ensure that this is agreed relatively rapidly, and that, if necessary, we put in appropriate support for schools that need to change.

What does the proposed merger mean for staff?

The Employer

Following the successful completion of the proposed merger, staff of Berkshire Schools Trust will be employed by Maiden Erlegh Trust.

A full TUPE consultation for transferring staff will be undertaken before Easter.

Staff Development

There will be increased opportunities for staff development, staff progression and staff retention. We hope that there will be a significant positive impact on recruitment and

retention, as new teachers recognise the professional opportunities afforded to them by working within a larger organisation.

Teachers and support staff can collaborate with, and learn from, colleagues across Key Stages, subjects and sectors.

Through our Teaching School, staff can access and develop a range of CPD from coaching, peer review, pod casts, leadership shadowing, job exchanges (eg: mainstream to special), research groups, networks etc. We encourage different voices in terms of CPD and welcome input from all.

We are keen to identify emerging talent and support those who have ambitions to progress into positions of leadership. We encourage them to discuss this with line managers and seize the opportunities on offer through the Trust and Teaching School.

Trainees and Early Career Teachers into the profession

The current schools are firmly committed to bringing on the next generation through teacher training programmes such as Schools Direct to Initial Teacher Training. In addition we contribute into the Apprenticeship Levy and we hope that we can attract young people to join as the next ICT technicians, or sports coaches, or take on administrative school roles.

Our Early Career Teachers will benefit hugely from the expertise of the middle and senior leadership teams and of course will have many learning opportunities as they can observe in all the schools as well as meet on a regular basis for moral as well as social support!

Staff Wellbeing and Working

We are committed to staff well-being and actions are outlined in our [Wellbeing Charter](#). Each school has its own version of this charter and they are reviewed regularly with colleagues.

Workload is a key concern for all areas of the organisation and it is factored into all decision-making. We have made significant changes over the last few years to reduce administration and remove unnecessary events from the calendar. This work is ongoing.

As a Trust, we have signed the Time-To-Change mental health pledge and we have worked with colleagues across the organisation to remove the stigma of mental health and to raise awareness and knowledge of how to maintain good mental health and how to support those with poorer mental health. All leaders have awareness training as part of their induction and each school has Time-To-Change Champions who can advise and signpost staff to information and support.

Maiden Erlegh Trust has a positive reputation for inclusion and equality but we acknowledge there is always more that can be done. We have agreed to a number of Diversity and Inclusion Actions to strengthen our work further in three key areas:

- Curriculum
- Human Resources and representation
- Student voice and developing quality discussion skills

Colleagues (including governors) and pupils/students from all schools are working together on these actions.

Relationships with trades unions are positive and we have calendared termly meetings in each school between representatives and Headteachers with shared agendas. We work closely and proactively with representatives on new initiatives or changes.

GOVERNANCE POST-MERGER

How will the merged Trust be governed?

The merged Trust will have a Board of Trustees who will be the responsible body for all the schools. They will set the overall strategic direction for the Trust and the schools, and maximize the funding for the benefit of all pupils/students equitably.

Similar to the Berkshire Schools Trust Local Academy Boards, individual schools within Maiden Erlegh Trust have Local Advisory Boards (LABs) who are responsible for ensuring that local standards and compliance are maintained and that the Headteacher and senior leaders are held to account. Another key feature of the LABs is that they ensure that positive links to the community are maintained.

More details about Maiden Erlegh Trust governance can be found [here](#).

Who are the Trustees?

Trustees are unpaid volunteers – they do not receive remuneration for their dedicated service to schools. Trustees are appointed by the “Members” and it is these Members who can also remove them. The board conducts a regular skills audit ensuring that it has the key skills to hold the Trust Executives and school leaders to account.

The details of Members and Trustees of each Trust are available on their websites.

Prior to the proposed merger, Members and Trustees from both Trusts will form a Steering Committee to help smooth the transition, and, on completion, the Trust Board will include Trustees from both Berkshire Schools Trust and Maiden Erlegh Trust as well as representatives from the Diocese and those with primary expertise. This will ensure that rigour and impartiality can be maintained.

How will Maiden Erlegh Trust have to adapt to working with faith schools?

For any MAT to include church schools it needs to have clauses in its Articles of Association which allow it to support church schools. This includes:

- Appointment of Members & Trustees from the Diocese
- Appointment of church school LAB Members from the Diocese
- Some built in protections for church schools in terms of staffing, teaching of RE and the provision of collective worship.
- Stipulation that Trustees must allow all schools to maintain their community individuality (lays within the principles of Fundamental British Values) ie: church schools retain their identity and ethos as such, but there is no intention to impose church characteristics on community schools.

It is important to note that once Trustees are appointed to the Board their primary aim is to fulfil their company objects. Therefore, all Trustees (for whatever reasons they

are appointed) are there to support every Trust school and the Central Trust organisation, and all pupils/students and staff within them. They are expected to act as a corporate body and not represent the interests of the body which happened to appoint them.

How is funding organised within the MAT?

Funding for schools within a MAT is allocated from the ESFA on an individual academy basis. It is governed through a Master Funding Agreement between the Secretary of State and the MAT, and supplemental agreements between the Secretary of State and each school within the MAT.

There are common financial procedures and delegations and each school will be expected to maintain their own budget allocations and provide value for money.

Maiden Erlegh Trust operates a GAG Pooling model which allocates funding to schools based on their school improvement priorities (curriculum, capital and other). These allocations are agreed annually by the Board of Trustees upon recommendation by the CEO and CFOO. Other budget elements are ring-fenced for specific purposes (eg: SEND).

How will we know money is being well spent and providing value for money?

There are many checks and balances on how the schools expend their resources.

The Trust has a calendared financial planning and monitoring process in line with the Academies Financial Handbook, and is subject to external auditing. Maiden Erlegh Trust and Berkshire Schools Trust audited accounts are in the public domain and can be found on the Trust websites. Financial robustness and value for money are also scrutinised by the Regional Schools Commissioner, ESFA and Ofsted.

Schools draw up rigorous improvement and strategic plans with demonstrable Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). These are agreed with the CEO and approved by the LAB and Trust Board. Proposed costings are signed off by the CFOO as part of the budget allocation process. Headteachers are expected to show value for money against these KPIs at school level and then for individual plans (eg: Pupil Premium, SEND).

Monitoring takes place monthly at Trust Level and then termly through the Finance Committee. Schools and LABs monitor their budgets prior to each LAB meeting.

The financial plans will also seek to make savings over the longer term by pooling and sharing targeted resources and benchmarking our operation against similar sized operations nationally.

What will happen to our land and buildings?

All land and buildings will become the responsibility of the merged Trust. Where there is a Diocesan interest in land and buildings, this will remain the responsibility of the Diocese.

NEXT STEPS

- A Joint Steering Committee has now been established from Trustees representing both organisations. They will collaborate on the merger process.
- Staff from each Trust are in close contact to lead on the operational side of the merger process.
- A formal consultation will take place between 18 January 2021 and 22 February 2021 for staff, parents and other stakeholders of the schools in both Trusts. Consultation will include:
 - Opportunities to provide written feedback and comments.
 - Virtual meetings with leaders from both Trusts.
 - A separate TUPE consultation will take place regarding transfer of employment of Berkshire Schools Trust staff to Maiden Erlegh Trust.
- Completion of a Due Diligence process by both parties, including eg:
 - A review of governance structures and an adoption of revised Articles of Association
 - A review of land and property arrangements
 - Establishment of new funding agreements and articles of association
 - An operational review, assessing the impact on contracts, banking and insurance arrangements
 - A review of school standards to understand strengths and improvement priorities.
- Approval obtained by the Regional Schools Commissioner

Subject to outcome of Due Diligence and consultations:

- Completion of transfer and signing new funding agreements by end August 2021