

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Parents

### 1. What is a merger?

A merger is when two separate Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) agree to come together to form one new, single legal organisation. This means they combine their governance, trust leadership, resources, and central services to operate as one Trust.

In this case, Quantock Education Trust (QET) and Bridgwater and Taunton College Trust (BTCT) are exploring the possibility of merging. If approved, this would involve bringing the strengths of both Trusts together to form a new Trust – with shared values, priorities, and a clear focus on improving outcomes for all pupils.

The merger process involves due diligence, engagement with stakeholders (including parents and staff), and approval from the Department for Education.

### 2. Which schools will be part of the newly merged Trust?

Under the proposal, the merged Trust would encompass 11 primary schools and 5 secondary schools. All of these schools are located in and around the Somerset area. Their close geographical proximity will be a major strength for the Trust, enabling us to deliver exceptional educational opportunities to approximately 7,000 pupils in the county, while employing around 1,600 dedicated teaching and support staff.

A list of our schools is shown below.

Trust	Primary	Secondary
Quantock Education Trust	Spaxton Church of England Primary School Stogursey C of E Primary School Ashlands C of E Primary School Haslebury Plucknett C of E Primary School Merriott Primary School St Bartholomew's C of E Primary School	Haygrove School Sexey's School
Bridgwater and Taunton College Trust	Bridgwater College Academy (Primary Phase) Hamp Academy Otterhampton Primary School	Bridgwater College Academy (Secondary Phase) Brymore Academy Stanchester Academy

	Maiden Beech Primary Academy Brookside Academy	
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Further information about each school can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/school-performance-tables>.

### 3. What will happen to West Somerset College as part of the proposed merger?

As part of the proposed merger, we are exploring options for the future governance of West Somerset College, including the potential for the academy to join another Trust to support a regional strategy for the structure of the education system in the West Somerset area. These discussions are at an early stage and are subject to approval by the Department for Education. Until any formal decisions are made, West Somerset College remains part of BTC Trust and will continue to operate as normal. There will be a separate FAQ documents for parents from West Somerset College. The focus remains on securing strong leadership, curriculum continuity and the best possible outcomes for pupils and staff.

### 4. What are the motivations for the merger?

The proposed merger between Quantock Education Trust (QET) and Bridgwater and Taunton College Trust (BTCT) comes from a shared ambition to improve education across Somerset and strengthen the support we offer to every school in our communities. Both Trusts have been working together in partnership since early 2025 and believe that formally coming together will help us deliver even better outcomes for children and young people.

For our schools, this means greater access to expertise, investment, and opportunities to learn from what works well in similar rural and small school settings.

By merging, the new Trust will be better placed to:

Build a clear education journey from nursery to post-16, with improved transitions between each phase of learning

- Offer specialist support and training for staff to help them grow their careers whilst staying local
- Ensure schools of all sizes and types are supported to thrive
- Use shared resources more effectively and support our Headteachers to focus on improvement
- Work more closely with local partners, including University Centre Somerset, to improve future opportunities for pupils

### 5. What will the benefits be?

We understand that choosing the right school and Trust for your child is an important decision. We want to reassure you that this merger is about creating more opportunities and delivering the best possible education for all our pupils. At the heart of this merger is your child's education and experience in school. By bringing together the strength of both Trusts we aim to:

*For pupils:*

- Offer the highest quality curriculum, bringing together great practice from each Trust
- Establish a ‘cradle to career’ local progression pathway for pupils from nursery through to degree level study
- Provide a greater sense of safety and belonging through enhanced transitions, with many children able to stay within the Trust from age 3 to 18
- Deliver an excellent teaching and learning experience, with lessons continuing to be delivered by expert staff who engage in evidence-informed, subject specific training and development
- Provide enhanced access to technology facilities/infrastructure
- Develop widespread enrichment opportunities building on existing strengths, such as QET’s Chinese exchange programme and links with the Yew Wah Foundation, its strength in Character Education, and BTC Trust’s college/vocational links, as well as establishing new opportunities for pupils to represent their school at larger scale events
- Forge a new partnership with University Centre Somerset college group (UCS) to strengthen pathways into further education and careers by creating meaningful connections and ongoing support for pupils’ future aspirations

*For staff:*

We know that a well-supported and highly skilled teaching team is key to providing the best education for your child.

Any merger must add value to staff, to encourage our most valuable resource to be able to develop a full and rewarding career with their Trust. Staff will have the opportunity to develop their expertise to become the best practitioners possible through:

- Higher quality professional development opportunities, with access to inhouse support and training opportunities, shared Trust wide inset days and expert input from a range of national/regional experts, as well an opportunity to expand professional development programmes, and shared professional learning communities
- Increased opportunities to leverage expertise, leading for example on curriculum development, our inclusion strategy and in quality assurance processes across a larger organisation
- A commitment to research and evidence-informed approaches to support sustainable and impactful change, including strong links with the Somerset Research School and the Education Endowment Foundation.
- Opportunities for career progression, knowledge exchange and secondments across schools within the Trust, enhancing practice through teaching in different contexts without needing to leave the Trust

*For families and communities:*

Both QET and BTC Trust are committed to working locally, serving children and families in the Somerset area. Many of our schools are closely geographically located and there are good links between schools, Somerset County Council and other Trusts locally.

With a Somerset-based MAT, families will benefit from:

- A Somerset all-through school offer, as all schools in the Trust will provide a similar high-quality education for their children
- A consistent experience from 3 – 18 years for their children, through staying in a trust with a clear identity and agreed approaches
- Greater trust in education, built up over a longer period of time, with more likelihood for their children to continue in education and transform their life choices

## **6. What would a merger mean for my child's school?**

While there may be some changes to governance and shared central services for the new Trust, what makes your child's school special will remain the same. Each school will retain its unique ethos, identity and commitment to delivering a broad and balanced curriculum that meets the needs of the young people and families it serves.

## **7. What would this mean for the current day-to-day experience of my child?**

Currently, there are no plans to change any aspect of the day to day running of any of our schools.

## **8. How will this change effect the way the children are taught, and what they are taught?**

There will be no immediate changes to the curriculum or the way children are taught because of this change. Each school will continue to deliver its current curriculum, ensuring quality, stability and continuity for pupils. In time, our schools will engage in deeper collaboration with each other, sharing best practice and resources to develop the strongest possible curriculum to meet pupils' needs.

## **9. Will the name of the Trust change?**

Yes, although none of the school names will change, we would like to establish a new Trust identity. We have not yet made any decisions about what the new name would be. If you have any ideas for names, please do let us know in the feedback form below.

## **10. Why are there not more secondary schools or post 16 provision in the proposed new Trust?**

At this stage, the Trust is being designed around the schools that have expressed a clear interest in joining and that are ready to move at the same pace. The initial group gives us a manageable and stable starting point. As the Trust becomes established, we expect to explore opportunities with more secondary and post-16 providers who may wish to join. Our aim is to grow steadily and sensibly so that any expansion strengthens, (rather than over stretches) the support we can offer to children and staff.

## **11. Will there be a change to SEND provision?**

SEND provision will continue as it is in each school, however there will be more opportunities for best practice to be shared as part of the continuous improvement of provision for all our young people, including those with additional needs.

**12. Will the admission criteria change for my child's school under the merged Trust?**

All schools across both Trusts will continue to fully adhere to the national Admissions Code of Practice. Further information on the school admissions code is available on the [Department of Education website](#) and each school's admission policy can be found on the school website.

**13. What changes will be made to Governance as a result of the merger?**

With the merger of the two Trusts, we will need to identify new Members and Trustees. The majority will be drawn from our existing Boards where we are fortunate to have dedicated volunteers with a wide range of outstanding skills, experience and expertise.

The Board of Trustees provides strategic oversight while decision-making for certain functions will continue be delegated to each school's Local Governing Committees. This ensures that each school can continue to meet the unique needs of its community while benefiting from the strength and support of the wider Trust. We believe this balance of local autonomy and collective collaboration is key to ensuring the best outcomes for our children and young people.

A key focus will be to maintain and strengthen governance, both at the Trust level and within each individual school. By ensuring strong and supportive leadership at all levels, we can continue to provide the best possible education and opportunities for our children and young people.

**14. Why the partnership with a college/UCSG?**

This is not a college-led model or a return to older sponsor-style structures. While University Centre Somerset (formerly Bridgwater & Taunton College) has historic links with BTCT, what we are proposing is a new partnership arrangement that brings schools and the wider education system closer together in support of Somerset's children. UCS will not be part of the new Trust itself but will be a local partner and support us in creating a more 'joined up' model in the local area for our children, helping all our schools improve together.

Outstanding teaching and pedagogy will be the core focus of the partnership. By aligning schools more closely with local excellent further education provision and post-16 pathways, we believe we can broaden opportunities for pupils, strengthen curriculum planning, and support teachers with access to high-quality professional development.

This is about working better together across the education system, from early years to college.

**15. What impact will the merger have on boarding?**

Boarding is a valued and distinctive part of our educational offer, and both Trusts recognise the importance of preserving and enhancing it. The two Trusts bring a strong understanding of specialist and inclusive educational provision, including the unique operational dimensions of state boarding.

**16. Will term dates change for our school after the merger?**

We know there are currently differences in how term dates are set across QET and BTCT schools. At this stage, no decisions have been made to change term dates across the Trust.

Following DfE approval, one of the next steps in the merger process will be to explore whether greater alignment of term dates would be beneficial or not.

Any changes would be made with plenty of notice and in full consultation with staff and school communities. Our priority will always be to

**17. What changes will be made to leadership as a result of the merger?**

Leadership in individual schools will remain unchanged. Leadership at a Trust level will bring together staff from both Trust teams, and we will be working with the Trust Board to carefully manage this transition.

**18. What financial considerations are being considered as part of the merger planning, and how might it support greater alignment or efficiency in shared services such as HR, finance, and school improvement?**

At this stage, the financial position and consideration of the merger are being carefully reviewed as part of the due diligence process. Trust funding contributes to a central services arrangement, which provides essential functions such as school improvement, payroll, HR, finance, ICT, legal and compliance. These are services every school requires. Delivering these through a coordinated central team reduces cost and duplication and ensures compliance.

One of the aims of the Trust model is to ensure that schools are well led, financially efficient, and able to focus resources on improving outcomes for pupils. Each school retains responsibility for managing its own budget in line with its priorities and context. As the merged Trust develops, opportunities for improved service delivery and operational alignment will continue to be explored.

**19. Is this merger financially driven?**

No. The primary purpose of exploring a merger is to improve educational outcomes and life chances for children and young people across Somerset. Both Trusts share a clear educational vision, and we believe that by working together we can strengthen support for schools, enhance staff development, and deliver even better experiences for pupils.

At this stage, the financial position and consideration of the merger are being carefully reviewed as part of the due diligence process. While financial planning is an essential part of any responsible organisation, this is not a cost-saving exercise. Where efficiencies are achieved – for example, through shared services or procurement, any savings will be reinvested directly into school improvement and frontline education

**20. How does the Trust's central services model support schools, and is it good value for money?**

Every school needs core support functions, from HR, finance and IT to estates, compliance, and school improvement. Delivering these services centrally through a Trust ensures they are professionally managed, cost-effective, and consistent across schools. This allows schools to

focus more time and energy on teaching and learning, with the reassurance that vital services are being handled by a dedicated team.

**21. Are stronger schools being expected to play a supporting role for schools that need additional assistance?**

While schools do benefit from collaboration, support, and shared expertise, each school is expected to manage its own budget responsibly and is held to account for doing so. Any school requiring specific support must have a clear improvement plan and the Trust must be satisfied that this will lead to better outcomes for pupils.

In fact, many of the efficiencies gained through trust working, for example, smarter procurement, better systems, shared staffing structures etc will benefit all schools, including those already performing well. The merger aims to build capacity and sustainability across all schools, not to redistribute resources.

**22. Quantock Education Trust has some Church schools; how will this affect other schools?**

The new Trust will be home to a diverse range of schools, including those with a Christian ethos. We believe in celebrating this diversity and we are committed to maintaining the unique character of each school. Each school within the Trust is committed to our common and shared values, making us a unique collective.

**23. How will parents, guardians and communities be kept informed during the merger process?**

We will keep you updated regularly through our usual channels, ensuring you have all the information you need.

**24. What are the timescales for the merger?**

Subject to feedback and approval, by the Department for Education and agreement from both Trust Boards, the earliest any merger will take place is 1<sup>st</sup> September 2026.

**25. How do I ask questions or provide feedback?**

We are seeking the feedback of parents, staff, governors, and other stakeholders on these proposals and would encourage you to submit any questions or comments using this form - [Stakeholder Engagement Form – Fill in form](#)