



**BERKSHIRE SCHOOLS
TRUST**



Merger of Berkshire Schools Trust (BST) with The Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust (ODST)

Frequently Asked Questions

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 shared values, in order to improve and maintain high educational standards for all their pupils.

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. Berkshire Schools Trust (BST) is the MAT that currently is responsible for your child's school. The proposal we are consulting you about would involve this changing to the Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust (ODST).

Who are ODST?

ODST is a successful multi-academy trust of 38 primary-phase schools in Oxfordshire and Berkshire. ODST's ethos as a MAT is one of empowerment. Schools serve their unique communities in the way they know best, with support from a central ODST team to ensure they have what they need to support their pupils to thrive and flourish.

ODST is an inclusive trust with a range of school types including small rural schools, large city schools, infant, junior primary and middle schools, church schools and schools without a religious character. ODST schools develop and share best practice and work in support of one another, whilst benefiting from strong central support services. ODST is committed to delivering an excellent education which meets the needs of all learners, and has a track record of delivering improvements in schools experiencing challenge, as well as in supporting strong schools to continue to develop and to share their expertise with others.

More about ODST can be found at [Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust](https://www.odst.org.uk/) .

Why do MATs merge?

MATs merge for a number of reasons. Underpinning our decision to merge is the need to provide a secure future for our schools within a Trust that offers a shared set of values and a shared 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.

What difference will I notice if my child's school moves to a different Multi-Academy Trust?

In the short term, nothing will obviously change. The role of your child's class teacher, the headteacher of the school, the office and support staff will not change as a result of the merger. Over time we hope you will notice continued improvements in the school as the benefits of being in a larger organisation start to filter through, but the very special school that we believe you value will be safe in its individuality and the way it serves your community.

Will parents still have a voice in how the schools are run?

ODST schools have Local Governing Bodies with elected parent representatives who serve each school. A lot of decision-making is delegated to these committees, so this is an important role and we hope some of you would consider whether this is something you could do. All the schools are committed to our community values, and this includes working with parents. So your ability to speak to your child's class teacher or headteacher about any concerns you may have will not change.

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. Schools in ODST generally follow the same or very similar holiday dates and school day as they did previously, and they keep in step with other local schools. Each school determines their term dates and training days ensuring that there are 190 days in total. Current BST schools will endeavour to remain in line with Reading dates as far as possible.

What will happen to the uniform?

There are no plans to change current school uniforms as a result of the merger.

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?

There are no plans to make a sudden change to your child's learning as a result of this merger. Teachers are always thinking about what to teach and how to teach it, and ODST schools are free to devise and implement the curriculum which suits them best. There is no single model that all schools are expected to follow. ODST leaders are passionately committed to investing in local curriculum design, so that leaders and teachers can tailor the curriculum to the needs and interests of pupils and allow teachers to be inspirational and love teaching and help pupils love their learning. This of course does not preclude the use of externally produced schemes, and schools serving similar communities often share resources and ideas with each other..

All schools are required to teach a broad and balanced curriculum and to monitor the impact of their curriculum carefully to ensure children are making strong progress. All schools have access to support both in other schools and from ODST's school improvement team to help them devise and implement a curriculum that enables children to live abundantly.

What happened to the Merger you consulted on last year?

Earlier this year, Berkshire Schools Trust and Maiden Erlegh Trust consulted on the proposal to merge together. The response was extremely positive but unfortunately a key stakeholder felt unable to support the proposal and the objections raised proved insurmountable. As a result, we explored all other options available to Berkshire Schools Trust (BST) and concluded that Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust would offer many exciting opportunities for BST schools.

ODST is a large Trust of 38 schools, focusing on primary school-aged children across Oxfordshire and Berkshire. By joining a larger organisation, our schools will experience many more opportunities for

school-to-school collaboration, a strong school improvement offer, effective pastoral and inclusion support, wider opportunities for staff development and greater potential for 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, Berkshire Schools Trust will cease to exist as a legal entity and its individual schools, along with all staff, assets and property, will become part of Oxford Diocesan Schools 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 Trustee 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. ODST was evaluated in January 2019 and the full report along with other information can be found here:

[Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust - Key MAT information \(odst.org.uk\)](http://odst.org.uk)

Are there any risks to the three schools as a result of this merger?

No. 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 have undertaken a thorough due diligence process.

All schools recognise that the school staff teams should focus on the pupils 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 part of a MAT, however, there is also a collective responsibility for all pupils and students so that no school is left behind. The central team 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 there be any automatic changes to admissions policies from the current BST schools?

There is no automatic change to admissions as a result of changing from one MAT to another. Admissions policies are considered by Local Governing Bodies and the MAT every year and determined well in advance. So even if any changes were proposed they would relate to the academic year 2023-24 at the earliest. ODST schools are encouraged to follow a model policy, but local needs are always taken into account.

What does the proposed merger mean for staff?

The employer of all the staff is currently Berkshire Schools Trust but it will become ODST. Staff who are transferred have a legal right to retain their existing terms and conditions. We do not expect that this transfer of employer will have any impact on your experience of your child's school.

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 equitably. Similar to Berkshire Schools Trust's Local Academy Boards, individual schools within Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust also have their own Local Governing Bodies (LGBs) which 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 LGBs is that they ensure that positive links to the community are maintained.

More details about ODST 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. [ODST Members and Trustees](#)

How does ODST support both church and community schools?

Trustees have both a desire and a duty to ensure each school retains its individual identity: church schools retain their identity and ethos as such, but there is also an absolute commitment to ensuring that community schools (those without a religious designation) retain their individual identity and serve their communities. New Town is a school without a religious designation and there are similar schools which are flourishing in ODST.

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.

What will happen to our land and buildings?

Ownership of the school sites will remain with the current owners – which is sometimes the Local Authority or the Church trustees in the case of the church schools. Currently there is a lease or similar legal agreement from the landowners to BST, who have responsibility to maintain the buildings and grounds. These leases will be transferred to ODST, should the merger go ahead.

How can I get the answer to a question not listed here?

You can get in touch with us via this email address, trustsecretary@berkshireschoolstrust.org or attend one of the consultation meetings listed in the letter accompanying these FAQs. There will be an opportunity to ask questions then.

What are the next steps?

The BST trustees are keen to hear your views. Once your comments and feedback have been received, they will be considered, and the trustees will meet and form a view as to whether the merger should continue as planned. If so, the expectation is that legal documents will be drawn up, the staff will be offered a formal employment consultation known as TUPE, and final checks will take place. We expect the transfer to take place in January 2022.

We will write to you once the trustees have considered all your responses to the consultation and confirm the next steps.