



Trust Merger

Stakeholder Engagement

Both the Trustees and Members of Minerva Learning Trust (MLT) have been looking to grow our family of schools for some time. We have been actively seeking schools or other multi academy trusts in the Sheffield and NE Derbyshire area who might wish to join forces. The reasons behind the ambition to grow our Trust are twofold: firstly, additional schools coming into our Trust will bring more capacity to fulfil our duty to improve our schools and to deliver our vision of providing an outstanding education; and, secondly, we want to be able to support more children, families and communities in our local area and to do so by offering a distinctive culture that is different to many of the larger national groups.

MLT were approached by **Cavendish Learning Trust** (CLT) asking us to engage in discussions about them possibly joining the Trust. CLT has one secondary and three primary schools all based in NE Derbyshire. As a small organisation and they do not have enough capacity to bear to fully deliver on their own vision and to take full advantage of the economies of scale being part of a larger Trust offers.

The discussions that followed between both Trust's Executive Team, Trustees and school leaders were very comprehensive and following intensive due diligence of MLT, undertaken by external consultants on CLT's behalf, they notified us that we were their preferred option. This is exciting as there is a close synergy between how both our Trusts support our staff, our schools, and our communities. We share the same vision and values for both pupils and staff. At the heart of this shared vision is a commitment to a strong culture of collaboration and a commitment to promote an inclusive approach for our most vulnerable children and families.

Minerva Learning Trust

Minerva Learning Trust was established in 2014 and today comprises of 800 staff and 6,000 pupils throughout its four secondaries, one Post-16 Academy and one primary school. The Trust is an expanding Multi Academy Trust with a vision of providing outstanding education for all the students within our schools.

The Trust resolutely believe that it is stronger together and that each school has individual strengths and unique qualities. The Trust is passionate that all students should see their time at school as happy and fulfilling with their potential developed to the utmost.

The Trust's vision of Working Together, Learning Together and Outstanding Together is underpinned by the core values of Inclusion, Independence, Respect and Success. Through these values the Trust fosters an ethos of collegiality, ensures inclusion is at the heart of all it does, and works hard to ensure that every child succeeds, no matter what their background or circumstance.

Cavendish Learning Trust

CLT was founded in 2016 and now has four schools 1,700 pupils. The schools include one secondary school, two primary schools and one Nursery and Infant School (Whittington Moor N&I Academy). The Trust is committed to helping overcome the inequalities between communities so that every one of their children can learn and prosper.

The Trust's vision is: ***'Communities learning together'*** and its mission is to be: ***'A family of schools focused on meeting the needs of our local communities, by providing innovative and engaging education to maximise all children and young people's life choices.'*** This is achieved through a focus upon:

- Teaching and Learning
- Professional development
- Wellbeing
- Ethical Leadership and
- Collaboration

This, we believe, shows the similarities between our two trusts and that commitment to learn together and deliver inclusive education. It is a values-driven organisation with a strong moral purpose. The Trust Boards and the Executive Teams are committed to ensuring that every school in the Trust will be stronger by being part a larger family of schools.

Both Trusts resolutely believe that each school should be at the heart of their communities with a staff body that is skilled but also supported to be the best that it can be. This is supported by an ongoing commitment to staff professional development to ensure provision of the highest quality of education.

Benefits of the Merger

Opportunities for children

- Increasing our capacity to drive for excellence in our classrooms to improve outcomes for all children in which knowledge, skills, expertise and resources are shared to improve all outcomes for our children,
- Enhanced provision for SEND specialists with increased income and efficiencies driven by larger economies of scale,

- The ability to broaden our academic curriculum and therefore the opportunities our children have,
- The aspiration to create more opportunities for pupils in our family of schools to come together in sport, music and performance,
- More funding being devoted to learning from the economies of scale that a larger trust can put in place,
- A more robust model of school improvement that focuses on the strengths and areas for development of each school; ensuring every school is a giver and receiver of support,
- Access to a larger school improvement central team to deploy targeted and specialist support to schools and facilitate the sharing of best practice between them.

Supporting and Developing our Staff

- Increasing our ability to provide professional development opportunities for our staff,
- Enhanced provision of SEND specialists,
- By increasing the range and number of people our staff can collaborate and share practice with – by working with peers across the city,
- Enhanced provision and support for our staff as an employee, supporting both their professional development and their wellbeing,
- Increased access to specialist consultants to support staff in their practice,
- Enhanced career pathways and opportunities for our staff.

Providing Long Term Continuity for our Schools

- The merger provides reassurance for the long-term future and viability of the Trust and our schools,
- Significantly improving the financial stability for our schools,
- Providing the opportunity to be involved in a larger trust that seeks to be part of a local solution to improving schools,
- This makes better use of public monies by allowing us to cut costs by sharing services, therefore directing more of our monies to the classroom and the learning of our children,
- Increased back-office support and expertise allowing further economies of scale.

A Merger with a Difference

The education landscape in England has been changing for a long time, with recent Government announcements encouraging small multi academy trusts to come together in mergers, such as the one we are proposing. In the Sheffield and NE Derbyshire area, we are seeing some of these mergers involving large national or regional trusts rather than a local offer.

Both trusts are heavily invested in and committed to our local communities, and by coming together and forming a larger Trust with increased capacity we feel strongly that we can really deliver far more for our young people and communities than we could do on our own.

We both have a culture of improving our schools through the involvement and engagement of the very people who make a difference - staff in our classrooms. This can be very different to the culture in other larger multi academy trusts who can have more of top-down model.

Becoming a larger Trust could be quite attractive to other schools in the local areas by offering a point of difference in our culture to others, at a time when a lot of schools are struggling with many different things from finances to recruitment. Whilst we are not looking to become a very large trust we could grow and offer more of the benefits that being part of a larger Trust can facilitate.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is this the right time to consider a merger of Minerva Learning Trust and Cavendish Learning Trust?

Yes, both Trusts have been considering their future development and have spent considerable time looking into options. We at Minerva Learning Trust have been looking to grow our family of schools for some time and have been encouraged to do so by the Regional Director for the Yorkshire and Humber region. More growth will result in future-proofing our schools and trust. At Cavendish, building capacity to support their children is an issue due to their size and resources.

Has the decision to merge already been made?

No. Whilst both the Board of MLT and CLT are strongly in favour of this merger, there is a formal process to be followed. Importantly, the proposal not only needs to consider the views of our stakeholders, but it also needs to be supported by the Advisory Board that serves CLT's region. It is the Advisory Board that will have the final say in whether the proposal to merge should go forward. The views of stakeholders will feed into that decision.

What is the timescale for the merger to happen?

We are anticipating that if supported by the Advisory Board we would look to formally merge from September 2024. This will provide enough time for stakeholder engagement and for us to consider and action any issues arising from any feedback.

Is there a cost to this process?

Yes, there will be costs as the DfE do not provide money for this process. Any costs for the merger will be met by our Trusts.

If the merger goes ahead how will this affect staff?

At the point of merger (1st September 2024), all CLT staff would transfer to be employed by Minerva Learning Trust. All current Minerva Learning Trust staff will continue to be employees of MLT. CLT staff will be protected to transfer on the same employment terms and conditions, including pensions. This is legally covered by the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE). Prior to a merger there would be a full staff consultation process which is set out in the regulations.

Who will be responsible for running our school?

Just like now at Minerva Learning Trust, it is the Board of Directors or Trustees that are responsible to the Secretary of State for the schools in a Trust. If the merger goes ahead that responsibility will continue to be the Board of Minerva Learning Trust; including all new schools and staff transferred into MLT.

Will the curriculum change?

We currently teach to the National Curriculum and we already have the power to change this if we wish. We have a culture across the Trust to do some things in a similar way, but much is left to the school leaders to contextualise their curriculum while being aligned to the agreed principles that we have in place for our curriculum. This will not change because of the merger.

Would the schools have to change its name, logo or uniform?

No, there will be no change to the name, logo or uniform of any school.

Would there be any changes to the admissions policy/criteria?

No, there will be no changes to the admissions policy or criteria.

Will our responsibilities in relation to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and exclusions change?

No, our responsibilities in relation to SEND and exclusions will be just the same as they are now. What we will have is increased capacity to support this important area of work.

Would the term and holiday dates or the timings of the school day change?

Academies, free schools and voluntary aided schools are able to set their own term dates but are asked to set the same or similar dates in the interest of parents who may have children at different schools. Our calendars have always been very much in line with local schools and other schools locally in each region and this will continue. Some synchronised calendar dates will allow us to potentially plan shared training and development on set Inset Days each year e.g., our annual Trust Conference.

How are pupils/students affected?

Pupils will not notice any immediate difference; they will be in the same uniform in the same classrooms with the same teaching staff. We will continue to strive for an outstanding education for all our children in every school. However, in time the children may notice changes and improvements in the way that

they learn which will result from greater training opportunities for all staff and wider opportunities for all pupils.

Will we get more money through this process?

We will continue to receive the same amount per pupil as we do now. However, through increasing the size of the Trust, by this merger, we will be able to achieve far greater economies of scale which ultimately means more monies going into learning.

Does this merger change the relationship with other schools and the community?

No, both of our Trusts are committed to being at the heart of our community, local schools for local children. We will continue to collaborate and share expertise with other schools outside of the proposed Trust and wider community.

What does the Regional Director do?

The responsibilities of the Regional Director (RD) include:

- Monitoring the performance of academies and intervening where underperformance is found.
- Making strategic decisions on the creation of multi academy trusts and granting academy orders.
- Ensuring there are enough academy sponsors to meet local demand.
- Working locally across children's social care, SEND, schools and area-based programmes to improve outcomes for children, families, and learners.

What happens next?

All stakeholders impacted by the merger will be informed. This document forms the basis of that. A comprehensive due diligence process will be conducted by MLT using external consultants to identify the benefits and risks of the merger to MLT.

It is important to us that, as part of the merger process, we gather as many stakeholder views as possible. **Stakeholders who wish to share their views about the proposed merger can do so by emailing: enquiries@minervalearningtrust.co.uk.**

Following the feedback, the proposal to merge will be considered by the DfE Regional Advisory Board in February/March 2024.