



West Kent Single Academy Trust Alliance

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why are we creating an alliance of Single Academy Trusts?

There is increasing pressure for all schools to join large Multi Academy Trusts (MATs), at present there is no legislation which can force this change but it is clear from government announcements that this is a desired outcome. Gavin Williamson, the previous Secretary of State for Education, outlined this vision in the attached link.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/education-secretary-speech-to-the-confederation-of-school-trusts>

All of the Single Academy Trusts creating this alliance value the individuality we offer, we have different mission statements but share a common commitment to provide the best education for the children in our care. We believe that parents value the choice that schools with individuality provide. Therefore, we do not wish to be absorbed into a Multi Academy Trust with a shared vision.

We do, however, recognise the benefits of collaborative working and school-to-school support, we, as school leaders, have been doing this for many years and these partnerships have been strengthened during the pandemic as we were all faced with unprecedented challenges.

The alliance formalises these links and we believe gives us all the benefits of collaborative working enjoyed by MATs, without narrowing educational choice within the local community.

What are the educational benefits to the member schools?

The schools involved in the alliance have already collaborated extensively but wish to formalise the arrangement. Initially the alliance will have five strategic key aims and objectives:

- To develop highly efficient school to school working across all areas of the school
- To support the continuous improvement of Teaching and Learning through CPD opportunities
- To improve the wellbeing and engagement of students
- To secure efficient and effective working practices
- To support and develop the staffing body (wellbeing, recruitment & retention)

Will the school name or uniform change?

No. All members of the alliance are clear on their expectations to remain independent and each school will maintain their unique individuality.

Will any staff leave?

There will be no changes to the existing staffing structure as a result of creating an alliance. In fact, a major drive to form our alliance is to provide better CPD (continuing professional development) and enhanced career opportunities for all our staff.

Will staff levels change?

Creating an alliance will not dictate the number or make-up of staff. Decisions on staffing will be made by the individual schools. There is no intention to create a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the alliance. Dependent on the success and growth of the Alliance there may be the future opportunity to create a Partnership Coordinator to manage the work of the Alliance, but any such position will be carefully considered and managed by the Alliance Strategic Board – represented by the Headteachers/Senior Leaders from each school.

Will the Terms and Conditions of staff change?

There is no intention to change Terms and Conditions. The creation of the alliance will have no impact on existing contracts.

As a partnership of schools will you have increased purchasing power?

Yes, it's probably the case that a group of schools will be able to obtain better value when negotiating contracts for services essential for running a school, such as: insurance, accountancy, human resources, payroll, broadband and other internet and IT services.

Would our school's budget be used to bail out another member school if it was in financial trouble?

No, and no decision will ever be taken that might jeopardise that. All schools within the alliance will have their own budget and financial control. If another school joined the partnership then they would only do so if their financial position was strong.

How is SEND affected??

The creation of the alliance does not mean there will be changes to the arrangements for supporting SEND pupils. Each school will continue to fully support children with SEND as we currently do, whatever form the additional support needs to take. The alliance status may provide benefits in this area through, for example, the sharing of expertise and support.

Will there be any change to the admissions policy?

No. The current arrangements for each school as determined by Statutory Admissions Code and Admission Appeals Code will apply.

Will the curriculum change?

Not as a result of the creation of the alliance. Curriculum provision is always under review and in time schools may align exam boards to provide more effective school to school support but any changes will always be conducted on what is best for the students at an individual school.

Will the term dates change?

All schools have the ability to set their own term dates. There is no intention to alter the current arrangements.

Will a parent's right to complain be affected?

No. All schools will maintain their own complaints procedures.

How will the alliance be run?

The Alliance will be lead and managed by a Strategic Board composed of the Headteachers/Senior Leaders of each member school. The Strategic Board will control and monitor the work of the Alliance; holding regular meetings to determine the support that the alliance can offer. There is no hierarchy within the membership and the alliance would be open to other schools joining over time. On an annual basis, there would be a joint meeting of the Strategic Board (Head teachers) and Members (Governor representative from each school) to agree the strategic priorities and provide accountability for the work of the Alliance.

When will the alliance start?

The proposed creation date is 1st September 2021.

Is there a financial cost to joining the Alliance?

A 'Partnership' fund to support the work of the Alliance will be formed. Contributions to the fund will be made on a pro-rata basis, dependent on size of each member school and will be commensurate with the planned level of support provided by the Alliance; Governing bodies of each individual school will be required to confirm all contributions. The Partnership Fund will be held in a separate account and usual financial scrutiny applied to ensure probity and value for money.

Will other schools have access or legal rights over school facilities?

No. Member schools may offer to support other schools through the use of facilities, particularly in the case of developing and improving student experiences, expertise and cultural capital via specialist provision, but these will be managed directly by individual schools themselves or via the Strategic Board.

What happens with a change in Leadership/Governance of one of the Member Schools?

We would hope that any new School Leaders and Governors would wish to continue membership with the Alliance however, there is no obligation for any school to remain affiliated to the group and membership can be withdrawn at any point.

Is there a timescale for the Length of the partnership between schools?

No defined timescale for the length of partnership has been established at this stage. The success of the Alliance will be continuously monitored and regularly reviewed to ensure it continues to meet its aims, with a realistic timescale for the Alliance to demonstrate an impact of between 1-3 years. A formal review with Members will take place on an annual basis.

Will there be equity in work across schools?

Yes. The Strategic Board will ensure that there is parity in the workload resulting from collaborative Alliance work and that no member school will be at risk of being negatively affected. Improvement and support activities will have a designated lead and these will be fairly and equally distributed across member schools. Any additional work load will be continuously monitored and reviewed.

Is there any risk of the Alliance or an individual Member School taking over another Member School in the circumstance of poor educational or financial performance?

No. The ultimate aim of the Alliance is to support efficient and collaborative school to school working. Any Member School being in the very unlikely position of demonstrating poor performance, will receive nothing but full and complete support from other Member Schools, should this be requested.

Full accountability for the performance of each individual school will always remain with the Governing Body and Leadership Team of that school.

Will collaborative work involve the sharing of staff across schools and, if so, how will students and staff remain safeguarded?

Elements of collaborative work across the Alliance may require staff to work together in different settings or schools. This will not affect the terms and conditions of any employees and will be with the full agreement of colleagues.

Individual school safeguarding procedures will always be rigorously applied and DBS documentation provided for all regulated activities.

Are we able to collaborate with schools outside the partnership?

Yes definitely, please retain existing partnerships, this is just another avenue to develop best practice. Knole Academy will continue to develop strong links with Sevenoaks School independently from the work with WKSATA.