**Frequently asked questions (FAQ)**

**If you are a member of staff please check the intranet for staff specific FAQs.**

**Why is a merger being considered and why now?**   
We believe wholly in deep and purposeful collaboration – working together we can get more of the right work done, and more quickly.  Both boards of trustees recognise the mutual strengths of each trust and the alignment of our respective visions for our schools and communities.

We have worked with Dixons for some time in various ways, and we know that we have closely aligned missions and closely aligned values – which sets us up well for this exploration.

**Who makes the final decision on the proposal?**   
The boards of both trusts would need to pass a resolution to approve the proposal once the relevant due diligence and legal processes have been completed. Approval would also be needed from the DfE.

**What does the due diligence process involve?**   
Both trusts independently carry out due diligence on each other. As part of this thorough process, several areas are explored. These include:

1. legal, compliance and contracts

2. financial stability and compliance

3. HR and organisational ways of working

4. premises, estates and property

5. quality of education, standards and safeguarding

6. reputation of the trust and its schools

**What are the advantages of this merger?**   
First and foremost – moral imperative – both our trusts are committed to making a difference where it matters most: we see the need and opportunities in the communities served by both Dixons and GAET.  We all work to improve the future for thousands of children in parts of the north of England where young lives are adversely affected by social and educational disadvantage.

A set of shared values led to the foundation of both trusts. We work with like-minded people following a common core vision. Both trusts believe in the benefits of close partnership working. We share a belief in the power of high-quality education and the growth of the children and young people within our schools means that the impact of a bigger trust, with its associated resource, would bring about improvements in all our schools. We have a firm commitment to providing the highest levels of care and academic achievement for all our children and young people, irrespective of their starting points or any disadvantage they may have.

We also believe increased partnership working and greater shared buying power would benefit all of our schools whilst allowing each to retain their own unique ethos within our own community. Our ambition is that all of our schools would benefit from shared networks and forums and systems as well as building on existing strong working relationships.

We believe that every child should be able to fulfil their academic potential and go on to thrive. Together, Dixons and GAET will be more than the sum of their parts: mutually offering capacity, building resilience and delivering on our shared mission.

Growth will also lead to greater resilience:

* structural resilience through groups of schools working together in a single legal entity with strong, strategic and focused governance
* educational resilience through the deeper collaboration and stronger conditions for building a culture of improvement
* financial resilience through greater economies of scale – ability to withstand a challenging fiscal climate, with the benefit of shared essential services
* workforce resilience through stronger, shared cultures of career development, with pathways across schools, bolstering the recruitment, development, and retention of teachers, leaders and support staff

**What is the proposed timescale?**   
We are committed to making sure this process is run well and at pace.  The details will depend on the outcome of the due diligence processes and DfE approval which we are still working through.  Trustees would need to consider all of the feedback and outcome of the consultation process and then meet to discuss whether they wish to proceed. If the decision is made to proceed, we will then be able to provide a more detailed timeline.

Staff and parents would be updated at each stage and staff from Great Academies Education Trust would be part of a separate consultation process under the TUPE regulations which is more specific and would give them a further opportunity to ask questions and understand how, if at all, their role would be affected.

**What does this merger mean for the children and young people we serve?**   
At GAET, everything we do is about enabling children and young people to thrive in the classroom, in their communities and in their futures. This is profoundly true of the Dixons team, too. Both organisations believe in deep, purposeful collaboration that strengthens what already works and helps us go further together.

Both GAET and Dixons share a commitment to educational excellence, rooted in values of equity, opportunity and local impact. Our trustees believe that bringing our trusts together would unlock new possibilities, not by changing who we are, but by deepening our collective capacity to serve the communities we’re anchored in.

By joining Dixons, GAET schools would benefit from the scale, resilience, and shared expertise of a larger trust with a proven record of driving improvement and building inclusive, high-performing school communities. This would be an opportunity to accelerate our improvement journeys.

While OFSTED is only one benchmark, it helps illustrate the impact of the Dixons model: 11 of the 13 inspected Dixons academies are currently rated Good or Outstanding, with nearly all improving at least one grade after joining, many by two, often in areas facing some of the greatest challenges.

But this merger is not just about performance data. It’s about the children we serve and the communities we’re part of and how we build on what already exists to make both stronger.

**Improved learning and life chances**

Ultimately, everything comes back to what happens in the classroom. Children and young people deserve schools that help them learn well, feel safe, and succeed whatever their background.

The Dixons school improvement model is proven to deliver strong academic outcomes across a range of contexts. It supports high-quality teaching, strong routines, inclusive behaviour systems and targeted intervention where needed.

**What this means for students:**

* better progress and results
* more confident, better-supported teachers
* equitable access to support and challenge
* a culture of high expectations, with clear values and strong relationships

**Impact on student outcomes to date includes:**

* trust-wide secondary performance: sustained Progress 8 gains across the board
* Liverpool cluster:
* P8 growth from +0.28 to +0.79
* One school now ranked 3rd most improved nationally
* Leeds-Bradford success:
* +0.28 P8 growth in a formerly struggling school, now leading on parental engagement
* Bradford rebroker:
* a previously Inadequate school now ranks 2nd highest in P8 across the trust
* multiple schools consistently in the top 10 regionally

This merger would give GAET students access to that same model, building on what already works and raising attainment for every student, especially those who need it most.

We are proud of what GAET has built and excited by the chance to take it further. Together with Dixons, we believe we can offer our children and young people something even stronger.

**Continuing to work at the heart of the communities we serve**

Both GAET and Dixons believe that schools should be at the heart of their communities, places of belonging, support, and partnership.

GAET schools already do valuable work with families and local services. This merger would allow us to strengthen and expand that role through Dixons’ nationally recognised place-based model, developed in close partnership with students, families, and organisations like Citizens UK and Parent Power.

Through this collaboration, we would work to enhance:

* community hubs – co-locating support services (health, welfare, education) within schools, tailored to local need
* local convening – bringing together NHS, council services, and voluntary organisations around the needs of families and young people
* collaborative funding – securing sustainable, cross-sector investment in community support

This model is already delivering impact across the North:

* NHS family support workers in schools in Bradford
* integrated neighbourhood health teams in Manchester
* university-led aspiration projects in Leeds
* expanded pastoral teams in Liverpool, improving attendance and reducing exclusions

Importantly, students are at the centre of this work, not just as recipients of support, but as active contributors and civic leaders. Through Citizens UK campaigns young people develop confidence, leadership, and a sense of agency in shaping their local area.

This merger would allow us to build on GAET’s existing strengths in community engagement, while accessing new resources, networks, and capacity to deepen that impact — ensuring every child is known, supported, and championed in and beyond the classroom.

GAET and Dixons also have a shared vision for students to receive a full and enriching education that supports their academic, social, and emotional development.

Joining Dixons would enable us to access to a trust wide enrichment programme that gives every child more opportunities to discover their interests, build character, and feel part of something bigger:

* The Dixons Cup – a year-round programme of sport, music, academic and creative events, where schools compete, collaborate, and celebrate achievement
* Trust-wide music performances – over 350 students recently came together at St George’s Hall in Bradford
* New enrichment partnerships – including rowing, outdoor expeditions, and national-level sport initiatives
* Residential experiences and aspirational university visits – helping children raise their sights, develop independence, and explore their future pathways
* Dixons Athletics Championships – bringing students together across regions in a celebration of achievement and community

GAET already offers a wide range of enrichment opportunities. Through this collaboration, we aim not to replace, but to amplify and extend what’s already in place, ensuring that more children, in more schools, benefit from high-quality, memorable experiences.

**Will the school names change?**   
The names would incorporate Dixons; the specific naming would be agreed together prior to merger.

**Will there be any changes to the admissions criteria?**   
We do not currently anticipate any changes to admissions criteria.

**Will term time and holiday dates change for 2025-2026?**   
There would be no changes for 2025/26. Dixons does operate a calendar across its trust which has a 2-week October half-term break, which means an earlier return from the summer holidays, which Dixons would consult on moving towards the following year.

We have been advised this is welcomed by current Dixons staff as it enables staff a longer period of rest following the busy first half-term of the year. It also provides the added benefit of one week of the half-term break being out of the usual peak holiday period, benefitting from cheaper breaks in the UK and abroad.

**The schools across both trusts are in quite different contexts. How will we work together?**   
Through a clear model of cross trust work and geographically proximate hubs. The schools of GAET would form a Greater Manchester hub, working closely with the two Dixons schools in Wythenshawe and their schools in north Liverpool.

Dixons works collaboratively across its trust, all along the M62 corridor, and does not have a purely geography-based approach to development, rather one based on what each school needs and can offer right now. Dixons has a proven model of school improvement and serves communities in a range of contexts. With this powerful combination of helpful geography and broader connections, there is the opportunity for GAET schools and colleagues to have more opportunities for connection and sharing ideas, development and more career pathways, both within hubs and across the combined trust.

**Does Ofsted consider each school on an individual basis or inspect the MAT as a whole?**

Ofsted considers each school on an individual basis currently but they would look at the MAT board as the accountable body for any individual school. It is likely MATs are soon going to be inspected as a whole too but we don't know how this would look at this stage.

**How would governance arrangements work?**   
Were the proposal to go ahead, GAET would move under Dixons’ existing governance arrangements with oversight being provided by the Dixons trust board.  Dixons believes that education needs skilled, experienced colleagues from all sectors and would welcome building relationships with GAET’s trustees and local governing bodies. There would be opportunities for members of the GAET board and governing bodies within the Dixons governance structure.

**Are there any financial risks to either trust?**   
Dixons and GAET are both in a strong financial position; therefore, the merged organisation will have a greater level of financial resilience to better support its schools, staff, and students through the growing fiscal challenges nationally.

Budget setting is always carried out well in advance so that any changes which need to be made can be implemented in good time to seek to achieve a balanced budget for every school. Budget monitoring would continue throughout the year by the trust board, and they would receive monthly update reports.

**Would the times of the school day and holidays change?**

We have no plans to change the times of the school day or the term dates for 2025-26. Any future changes would be subject to extensive consultation with families.