



Frequently asked questions (FAQ)

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

Please note that regular updates are now being made to this document and the latest updates will be shown at the top of the document with date stamps.

Published on Wednesday 24th September 2025

What does Dixons' aligned autonomy (known as 'the backbone') look like and what is expected to be aligned?

DAT has an outline of what's aligned across its schools that can be viewed here via the Dixons website with a video and some information regarding the approach to aligned autonomy.

[Dixons Academies Trust | Aligned autonomy](https://www.dixonsat.com/why/aligned-autonomy) - <https://www.dixonsat.com/why/aligned-autonomy>

The process of aligning GAET schools with this model would take place over time, with the plan for schools as part of the onboarding process, and linked to looking at priorities for schools more broadly.

In advance of the start of the TUPE process, can we get some further detail on generally what terms and benefits Dixons offers for their staff?

Yes - we would recommend that for further information GAET colleagues can visit the Dixons Careers Website.

There are links to some pages in the site below which may be of specific interest:

[Benefits - Dixons Academies Careers](#) - Outlines a summary of terms and conditions and other benefits

[Hear from our employees - Dixons Academies Careers](#) - Videos of staff talking about their experience of working for Dixons including staff from schools who joined Dixons.

Of course, this does not impact the rights of all GAET staff for protection of their existing contractual terms under TUPE.

Published on Wednesday 17th September 2025

How does the 9-day fortnight work?

- The 9 in 10 flexible working model for teaching staff was launched as a pilot last academic year within Dixons and this is something which has continued following its success.



- Colleagues have complete discretion over how they use their 9-in-10 day – whether for rest, personal development or voluntary work preparation. No prescribed activities or work expectations apply.
- This flexibility is designed to reduce structural rigidity in teaching roles while maintaining high standards.
- This initiative recognises that great teaching requires both:
 - protected time for recovery
 - professional autonomy to optimize one's work-life rhythm
- Dixons goal is to sustain excellent teaching through smarter working patterns, not reduced standards.
- Teaching staff receive their minimum 10% of PPA as normal. The 10th day in the 9 in 10 model comes from us finding the time within our academies and looking at how we timetable.
- Leaders would work with Principals to implement 9 in 10 - this is not something that would be launched immediately post-merger as it requires time to set up.

Teachers in Dixons receive the 9-day fortnight. What is the offer for associate staff?

Dixons offers a bespoke collection of flexible working options, such as the 9 in 10, hybrid working or additional structured time away during term time, that are personalised to individual need or role.

After listening carefully to associate staff from this September, Dixons has started to introduce structured time away for all associate staff, and hybrid working tailored to role requirements.

Here's what this means:

For all term-time staff:

- Up to 2 personal days per year for significant life events

For all-year-round colleagues

- +3 days annual leave — Christmas closure days no longer count toward leave entitlement

For educational associate staff where being on site is a critical requirement of the role

- For roles which fall in this category the additional aligned time requirement will be 6 days, typically 2 days per cycle.
- Individual academies have autonomy over how they achieve this, but across Dixons we align the overall offer to ensure fairness for staff in similar roles.

For educational associate staff where there is greater flexibility over where they do their work

- For roles which fall in this category the additional aligned time requirement will be 3 days, typically 1 day per cycle, plus providing greater opportunities for hybrid working where possible.
- We will increase hybrid working opportunities beyond non-academy based central staff supported by a new trust-wide policy.

These changes significantly enhance what are already sector-leading terms. Should the merger proceed Dixons will work with GAET to review current terms and develop a tailored transition plan to extend the offer to associate colleagues within GAET.

Dixons Academy Trusts' response to the Additional Resource Base at Copley Academy

On behalf of Dixons Academies Trust, I am writing to confirm our support for the additional resource base (ARB) at Copley Academy. We understand this resource base aims to serve children in Key Stage 3 with additional needs, primarily Speech, Language and Communication Needs.



We recognise the increasing demand for specialist provision in Tameside, which has seen an unprecedented rise in children with education, health and care plans (EHCPs) from just 25 children in 2014 to 3,702 in 2025, representing 9.6% of the child population, compared to 4.8% nationally. The ARB at Copley Academy is a key part of the Local Authority SEND Sufficiency Strategy (2024–2034) plans to introduce 143 additional resource base places across 12 sites by September 2025 as part of a strategic response to reduce the reliance on out-of-area placements, improve local access and manage high-needs costs more sustainably. Establishing this ARB within a mainstream setting will greatly benefit children who require enhanced support, while enabling them to remain within their local school community.

This proposal aligns with Dixons Academies Trust. We are committed to ensuring that every young person, regardless of need or background, can access an inclusive education that empowers them to succeed academically, thrive personally and enjoy broad life opportunities.

We are committed to supporting the successful establishment and long-term sustainability of the ARB by leveraging our trust wide strengths:

- **Leadership and governance:** we will provide strategic guidance and robust oversight to guarantee high quality, sustainable provision.
- **Expertise and best practice:** Copley Academy will benefit from access to our trust-wide SEND and inclusive teaching expertise, ensuring the ARB is informed by evidence-based practice and innovation.
- **Partnerships and collaboration:** collaboration between families, the local authority and health and social services will be central to our approach. Together, we will ensure a cohesive support network for students.

We believe the ARB will significantly enhance the local SEND provision in Tameside, addressing a current gap and creating a model of inclusive excellence.

Dixons Academies Trust supports the proposal for the ARB at Copley Academy. We will commit our trust's capacity, expertise, and resources to ensure this initiative is a successful and sustainable addition to the local SEND landscape.

Dixons Academy Trusts' response to the Additional Resource Base at Silver Springs Primary Academy

On behalf of Dixons Academies Trust, I am writing to confirm our support for the additional resource base (ARB) at Silver Springs Primary Academy. We understand that this resource base aims to serve children in the early years foundation stage (EYFS) and Key Stage 1 with complex communication and interaction needs.

We recognise the increasing demand for specialist provision in Tameside, which has seen an unprecedented rise in children with education, health and care plans (EHCPs) from just 25 children in 2014 to 3,702 in 2025, representing 9.6% of the child population, compared to 4.8% nationally. The ARB at Silver Springs Primary Academy is a key part of the Local Authority SEND Sufficiency Strategy (2024–2034) plans to introduce 143 additional resource base places across 12 sites by September 2025 as part of strategic response to reduce reliance on out-of-area placements, improve local access and manage high-needs costs more sustainably. Establishing this ARB within a mainstream setting will greatly benefit children who require enhanced support, while enabling them to remain within their local school community.



Great Academies Education Trust

This proposal aligns with Dixons Academies Trust. We are committed to ensuring that every young person, regardless of need or background, can access an inclusive education that empowers them to succeed academically, thrive personally and enjoy broad life opportunities.

We are committed to supporting the successful establishment and long-term sustainability of the ARB by leveraging our trust wide strengths:

- **Leadership and governance:** we will provide strategic guidance and robust oversight to guarantee high quality, sustainable provision.
- **Expertise and best practice:** Silver Springs will benefit from access to our trust -wide SEND and inclusive teaching expertise, ensuring the ARB is informed by evidence-based practice and innovation.
- **Partnerships and collaboration:** collaboration between families, the local authority, and health and social services will be central to our approach. Together, we will ensure a cohesive support network for students.

We believe the ARB will significantly enhance the local SEND provision in Tameside, addressing a current gap and creating a model of inclusive excellence.

Dixons Academies Trust supports the proposal for the ARB at Silver Springs Primary Academy. We will commit our trust's capacity, expertise, and resources to ensure this initiative is a successful and sustainable addition to the local SEND landscape.

Published on Tuesday 16th September 2025

If the merger proceeds, are there any implications for teachers who are in the Early Career Teacher (ECT) stage?

Both DAT and GAET use Ambition Institute as the accredited provider for the Early Career Framework (ECF) programme for ECTs. This means that there is already a common ECF curriculum in place for ECTs in both trusts. In practical terms, Year 1 ECTs will continue on the GAET ECT curriculum. If the merger proceeds, there may be some minor amendments required to align the Year 2 ECT curriculum from September 2026, but these are expected to be minimal. For current Year 2 ECT colleagues, they will complete the year 2025 as has already been planned. This will not affect the statutory induction period for ECTs, or any of the statutory arrangements for ECTs as part of DfE compliance for those teachers registered as ECTs.

Published on Wednesday 10th September 2025

Why can't individual schools be transferred to other trusts? Why does it have to be all schools going together into one trust?

The trust has been through a complex and detailed process to find a solution which most closely aligns to our vision and principles for all our schools as we are stronger together. We used an external specialist, and took advice from DfE and others, throughout the process. Transferring all four schools, as a group, into another trust is the strongest and most attractive proposition for all parties, as it enables good practices to be amalgamated and enables economies of scale.

The approval to explore a merger with Dixons was given on the basis of all schools being transferred together and DfE have clarified their support and position for the merger below.



“Whilst this transfer was initiated by Great Academies Education Trust (GAET) discussions have been ongoing over a number of years between leaders at the Trust and the Department. An academy transfer is when an academy moves from its current trust (‘the outgoing trust’) to another trust (‘the incoming trust’). A transfer can only happen with the agreement of the regional director (RD) acting on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education and individual academies that are part of a MAT can only transfer with the agreement of the MAT.

In this case, GAET has made the decision that **all** schools should potentially transfer to Dixons Academies Trust. As part of the Department’s decision-making process, the NW RD assessed each academy’s circumstances, and the capacity of the trust, in order to decide whether an academy transfer is appropriate to bring about the necessary level of improvement and ensure the highest quality education for pupils. The transfer was presented at July’s Advisory Board, along with consideration to any to any representations made, with the RD agreeing to the transfer.”

DfE Regions Group

The focus of the extended consultation process is on the current proposal, as presented i.e. the proposal that all four GAET schools and central team colleagues join Dixons. On this basis, it is currently not an option for individual schools to discuss or explore their own separate mergers at this point in time.

Published on Tuesday 9th September 2025

What is the latest information regarding the potential date that merger would be completed, if it goes ahead?

Following on from recent meetings between all parties with the DfE, and the extension of the stakeholder consultation period, the conditional date for completion of the merger is potentially the 1st January 2026. This would remain contingent on decisions to proceed and all legal matters being resolved between now and then. Further updates regarding this date, and a confirmation when this date is finalised, will be shared via FAQs when and as available.

Published on Wednesday 27th August 2025

Will Dixons be declaring any TUPE measures related to restructuring?

No. The transfer will proceed as follows:

- All GAET staff will transfer to Dixons with their existing terms and conditions fully protected under TUPE.
- For a small number of colleagues, mainly in central teams, some reporting lines will change. We will discuss this directly with the individuals affected during the TUPE consultation.

Dixons has a highly discussed a centralised operations model. How will this impact relevant GAET staff?

The integration will be managed in two key phases:

1. Review and planning: after the transfer, Dixons will conduct a detailed analysis of all systems and processes to develop a transition plan.
2. Managed transition: teams will move to the Dixons operating model over a sensible period.



Published on Wednesday 20th August 2025

What are the key benefits of working for Dixons?

Dixons offers a generous package of benefits which at least meet and/or exceed national terms and conditions, as well as several additional benefits such as a 9-day fortnight for teachers, tailored flexible working options for all staff, and automatic pay progression. Dixons also offer a health cash plan and salary sacrifice schemes. For more details and to hear from staff, please visit their careers site.

Last year, from over 170 trusts, Edurio placed Dixons placed in the top 10 for creating an environment where staff feel confident in the value of being part of the trust.

Trust value award: <https://home.edurio.com/news/trust-value-award/>

How do the missions, values and principles align between GAET and Dixons?

Dixons and GAET both share a deep commitment to transforming student life chances through outstanding education and true inclusion. We serve our communities driven by a common mission, shared values, and a culture of high standards, collaboration and kindness.

The best way to understand an organisation's values is to talk, visit, and see a culture in action. There will be opportunities throughout the merger process to share our values and for the teams in each organisation to visit each other. GAET and Dixons have already worked together closely for some years, with the clear finding of a strong mutual mission alignment for the best outcomes for the students and communities we all serve.

The process to align on mission and values will be constructive, with the Dixons' mission and values remaining in place across our merged trust and development work happening across each school to reflect the local community and team.

Are there going to be changes to Governance if GAET moves to Dixons?

There will be availability of board seats for a number of GAET trustees.

Both GAET and Dixons share a deep and enduring commitment to the communities we serve, and the meaningful contribution of members of local governing bodies and local academy boards. GAET's local governing bodies would evolve to harmonise with Dixons' local academy board model. The priority remains to have local representation for schools serving diverse communities.

Local academy boards work with a cluster of schools rather than one school. Members of local academy boards serve as ambassadors to and champions of the local community, holding primary responsibility for meaningful stakeholder engagement, acting as 'eyes on the ground' for the board around student, staff, and family experience. The groups meet three times per year to conduct these duties, along with the local principals.

Will there be changes to educational IT systems?

As with all areas of a school trust, the priorities remain safety and quality of education.

Any changes to IT tooling will be carefully planned to minimise disruption and full training will be provided where relevant.

What is done to ensure quality and spirit of stakeholder engagement?

Dixons and GAET teams fully recognise the importance of genuine engagement with all stakeholders as we move through the process and are committed to fully engaging and responding to concerns and feedback. Both our trusts will ensure an ongoing dialogue both leading up to and after any transfer.



What is the plan to support school improvement for the current GAET schools?

Dixons' approach is adaptive and evidence-led: priorities will be refined as they learn more about the GAET schools' contexts. For now, they're concentrating on two key levers:

Building on GAET's progress with a focus on great teaching: Dixons will start by working alongside GAET's school leaders to strengthen instruction – identifying the strongest teachers, developing their expertise, and empowering them to support others. This bottom-up approach will ensure sustainable improvement while respecting what's already working well.

Accelerating impact through partnership and scale: drawing on Dixons' research school, leadership development, academy transformation model, and strategic partners, highly targeted support will help GAET schools improve faster – always grounded in their context and always focused on outcomes for children.

Next steps will evolve as Dixons engages with staff, data, and communities – but these priorities will anchor their early work.

Will our school lose autonomy?

Dixons operates on an aligned autonomy model, which seeks the perfect balance between consistency and self-determination for individuals and schools. This framework provides clarity on the areas of both alignment and autonomy, all implemented through local context and leadership. Dixons is committed to working closely with GAET leaders ahead of the merger to shape how this applies to each school. Clear communication, realistic timelines, and support will ensure all colleagues understand what to expect in real terms.

What is the difference in Examinations?

Dixons has alignment with the EBacc to drive outcomes, but there is also flexibility for innovation where the trust has confidence. Below is a summary of the key examination boards Dixons use across the EBacc. There is significant commonality between Dixons and GAET. Any changes post merger would be carefully considered, clearly communicated and focused on improving student outcomes, with sufficient time and support to ensure a smooth transition. Across other subject areas, there is no common alignment, but in some instances, there is natural alignment due to the collaborative working across Dixons.

- Mathematics – Pearson Edexcel
- English Language, English Literatures, Languages, Geography, Combined Science, Separate Sciences – AQA
- History – OCR, AQA and Pearson Edexcel

What is Dixons approach to SEND?

Dixons' SEND provision is built on true inclusion, with a clear vision and a proven model delivering strong outcomes.

An evidence-informed, transformative, whole-school approach ensures equity by embedding inclusivity into teaching, routines, and culture.

The impact of Dixons' work shows the strength of their model:

- EHCP students achieve nearly double the national average Attainment 8
- Almost all our secondaries exceed national Progress 8 for students with an EHCP; five have a positive Progress 8 for EHCP students
- Primary SEND support outcomes in reading, writing, and maths have risen 12% in two years.

Dixons is fully committed to the proposed ARPs at Silver Springs and Copley – both are key, locally-driven models of SEND excellence.

How is Dixons performing in terms of standards and performance, and how does this compare with GAET?



Great Academies Education Trust

This merger is rooted in collaboration – accelerating progress, raising attainment for students, and delivering greater impact.

Dixons has a proven track record of success. At secondary, their students consistently achieve above nationally expected progress, from a range of schools with historically poor outcomes. Last year, their newest turnaround school was the third most improved in the country. For disadvantaged students, Dixons ranks in the top 5% of trusts nationally for attainment – despite serving two of England's four most deprived communities.

At primary, Silver Springs holds significant strengths and will join a network that combines deep local commitment with the power of shared expertise. This partnership will provide capacity for development, opportunities to share best practice, and a foundation to grow Dixons' primary phase in Tameside.

Dixons' commitment to excellence spans all stages. Out of all dedicated 16 – 19 providers nationally, students at Dixons Sixth Form achieved the third highest average grades, and the academy is recognised among the top ten institutions for student choice.

Ofsted:

- Over 40% of Dixons' academies are Outstanding.
- 3 of Dixons' 5 primary schools are Outstanding (including one that joined in special measures).
- All of Dixons' turnaround schools have improved their Ofsted judgements since joining the trust – most by two grades.

GAET's current headline Ofsted judgements:

- Copley Academy – Graded Good in all headline judgements
- Great Academy Ashton – Graded Good in 3 out of 4 headline judgements
- Middleton Technology School – Graded Good in all headline judgements
- Silver Springs Primary Academy – Graded Good in all headline judgements
- GAET/Pioneers SCITT Graded Good in all headline judgements

Secondary performance comparison:

	Dixons 23/24 published data	Dixons Most recent turnarounds only (most with Dixons less than 3 years)	GAET 23/24 published data
Average grade	4.7	4	3.8
5+ English and maths	46	35	29
Progress	+0.1	-0.3	-0.6
National rank for disadvantaged students	32		193

Continuing to work at the heart of the communities we serve: will this change?

Building on GAET's strong foundations, Dixons will deepen community impact through their award-winning place-based model: ensuring every city or town has a Citizens UK and Parent Power alliance which amplifies student and family voice, school-based community hubs to



enable family support, and convening partnerships with local partners, including the NHS and children's services. Dixons was recognised for this model in winning the 2024 TES Tim Brighouse Award.

Expanding opportunities through Dixons' networks: GAET schools will gain access to the Dixons Cup (cross-subject enrichment), large-scale inter-city sport and arts events, civic engagement activities, and their outdoor education expertise and funding – adding scale and specialist support to existing strengths.

Published Monday 4th August 2025

During the stakeholder consultation process, a number of questions about the proposed merger with Dixons were direct to the Board and have been answered by them. Some of these questions were very similar, so have been grouped together. For this reason, you may not see the precise wording of the question you asked below.

Is a merger the 'best next step' for GAET, its children, staff and communities, and will it get us there faster than we could get there on our own?

This is not a decision we have rushed into or taken lightly. As a trust board we have to consider GAET as a whole, which covers four schools, a SCITT, our 500 staff, and all the children and families in our community with whom we work across the trust. As a Board, our primary objective is to enhance the performance of our schools so that students and pupils can improve their future life chances.

We established our current strategic plan as a trust approximately five years ago. Since then, we have worked exceptionally hard to align all our activities, recruitment, and capital expenditure with the aim of improving the outcomes for children attending our schools so that they may meet and hopefully exceed, expected academic standards.

We have dedicated a substantial amount of support to achieving the targets set out in our strategic plan and have spent over £3 million of the trust's reserves in an effort to attain the improved outcomes.

Our academies have a lot to be proud of, and they have undoubtedly achieved a great deal, but the trust board has for a number of years been seeking a step change in educational outcomes for its students. Despite our best efforts, it became evident, that the trust needed to adopt a different approach as the trust does not have sufficient internal capacity to deliver the required level of change within the necessary timescales. Our outcomes, including external examination results and attendance figures consistently fall significantly short of our own predictions and national expectations, and two of our schools were subject to termination warning notices imposed by the DfE. The current government withdrew these, but the problems they highlighted remain for GAA.

Continuing our current approach for the next four years was not considered to be acceptable and would only have seen more students fail to reach their full potential, to the material detriment of those individuals, their families and the wider community. A clear need for change within the trust has emerged, and the option of merging with another trust with a track record of successful delivery was considered to be the most impactful and efficient way to achieve the educational outcomes that our children need and deserve.

Having commenced the process in April 2024, exam results in August 2024 were again below predictions made by the schools and well below national expectations. This reiterated the urgent need to take decisive action.



Given the failure to achieve the necessary improvement from within the existing trust resources a merger with another Trust was considered to be the least disruptive option for our staff and children.

The trust board remains committed to finding the right partner to merge with. It is for this reason that we have consulted widely and why we and the prospective merger party are currently engaged in a period of due diligence to ensure that the merger is a good fit for our schools and our communities.

What is the reason we are completing this merger process so quickly?

The GAET trust board commenced the process of exploring a potential merger in April 2024; it is not a decision they have rushed into or taken lightly. It is acknowledged that staff colleagues were not briefed on the decision to explore a merger until May, ahead of the stakeholder consultation process opening - so it may feel quick. It will not be rushed, but there is a desire from the trust board to move at pace through the due diligence process. This will enable a decision to be made regarding whether or not the merger should go ahead, which will provide more certainty to everyone involved.

On what basis did GAET's trust board select DAT?

As a trust board, we engaged in a thorough reflection on the necessary changes and sought guidance from the DfE and specialist consultants in April 2024 and at that point made the decision to explore the possibility of merging with another trust.

When we commenced this process, we had no preferred trust in mind but we were anxious to try and ensure a reasonably close alignment with GAET's existing principles.

The process of identifying suitable trusts started in April 2024, with the assistance of a recognised education consultant to review the available trusts with which we might merge, and with the support of the DfE who recommended a number of strong trusts that could potentially provide the necessary and effective support to achieve the required improvement in educational outcomes.

Our extensive list of potential partners initially included over 30 academy trusts, many of them local ones, which appeared to share similar characteristics and shared values as GAET. To create a manageable process the board narrowed this long list to a short list to allow for further, more detailed due diligence.

A key decision made by the board was that any decision should prioritise the best outcome for all schools. Therefore, we sought a partner who could enhance our delivery primarily through the ability to allocate resources effectively at both primary and secondary levels, who were large enough to be able to provide the depth of support that GAET requires, and who were a decent match in terms of ethos and values. This process resulted in DAT being shortlisted for in depth due diligence.

We engaged with the senior leadership team of the trust, and the Principals of some of our academies attended the presentation from DAT, which followed a written submission and took place in November 2024 when there was an opportunity to ask questions about DAT and its intentions.

Due diligence continued on prospective merger partners in the early part of 2025, and members of the board visited a DAT school in February to witness for themselves how DAT managed that school. The board also met with another (much smaller) academy trust who had expressed an interest in a possible merger which presented a good opportunity to compare different approaches to school improvement.

As a final point, it is worth explaining, that independently of the prospective merger our schools have been effectively collaborating with DAT on school improvement for two years in a partnership arrangement that seems to have worked well for all concerned.



Other local academy trusts, such as Ambition Institute and Stamford Park Trust, have strong records with primary schools in Tameside. Why are they not being considered for the takeover of GAET?

Both of these local trusts were seriously considered but ultimately discounted by the trust board. Stamford Park does not have any experience delivering improvement in primary schools and focuses solely on secondary and FE institutions. In terms of size, they are similar to GAET. However, their small size is likely to limit their ability to provide the depth of support that GAET requires. Ambition Community Trust, on the other hand, does offer primary school services but lacks the depth of support that our three secondary schools require. It is also a relatively small trust.

What steps will be taken to ensure local culture and excellence are not lost in the transfer to DAT?

Values, culture and ethos were at the centre of our search for a potential trust; after a long and detailed search DAT aligned closest to our own.

Dixons have consistently emphasised that, whilst it is a successful national trust, it does allow local decisions and has a proven track record of working with similar (and in some cases more challenging) communities to implement the changes we are now proposing to undertake.

GAET is committed to our existing communities and understands the need for strong local governance. We have a strong track record of supporting some of the most vulnerable pupils and their families especially during and since the Covid epidemic. We have been heartened by Dixon's desire to further improve our approach.

As detail in previous questions, it's important to remember we do need an improvement in our results as a trust so have to recognise the need for the positive changes we want Dixons to bring.

What specific plans or assurances can the trust board provide to ensure that the needs of our most vulnerable pupils, particularly those with SEND, will continue to be met with the same level of commitment and tailored provision under DAT?

There will be no change to the SEND delivery at transfer. As a board, we have continued to invest in the SEND model, with nearly £1 million in investment in both capital and staffing for the new academic year. If either GAET or Dixons believed there was a misalignment on SEND or inclusion, we would not have continued to extend and invest in the provision at two of our academies commencing in the autumn term with the blessing and encouragement of the local authority.

How will the trust board ensure that the distinct ethos and values of my academy are preserved?

From the outset GAET trustees have been seeking a possible merger with a trust that understands our principles and approaches and is willing to accommodate these as the two trusts merge. We have found the senior staff and trustees at Dixons open to this and they believe GAET can strengthen their provision as well as offer support to GAET academies.

Many of the trusts we considered were rejected purely because they were not a decent match in terms of ethos and values. The current due diligence process will compare in detail the two academy trusts and any differences will be highlighted with potential mitigation.

What are the 'next steps' for staff?



It's understandable that staff have a lot of questions about what this might mean for them, their terms & conditions, and their working arrangements. If a decision to proceed with the merger is taken, a separate formal TUPE consultation will follow involving staff and recognised trade unions.

To be absolutely clear, in case there is any misunderstanding - this is a proposed merger, not a process of academisation; all of the schools are already academies. Many staff will have previously undergone a TUPE process when their respective schools transitioned to academies and joined GAET. They continue to adhere to their existing terms and conditions, which were agreed upon during that TUPE process.

Will the merger definitely happen?

GAET and Dixons Academy Trust (DAT) are currently exploring the merits of a merger but neither trust board has agreed to merge at this time. Each trust is undertaking detailed due diligence on the other to ensure that it is in its interests to merge.

How is GAET ensuring sufficient and meaningful consultation with stakeholders?

As an academy trust exploring the possibility of merging with another academy trust, consultation is not a "statutory" requirement of the process. However, as a board, we believed it beneficial and important to gather as much feedback from all stakeholders, including staff, families and local communities. In doing so, we conducted early stakeholder consultation during the second part of the summer term with a wider audience of people. This approach took place in parallel with our initial due diligence processes. Nevertheless, the clear benefits of conducting more consultation than required outweighed the additional work it brought for the board.

Staff were formally told of the potential merger before the May half term break, and the wider community consultation commenced on 16th June 2025 and concluded on 11th July 2025, spanning four full weeks without any breaks prior to the school holidays, and providing a reasonable period for stakeholders to discuss the proposals and respond.

By the end of the consultation period, we had received 137 representations, which a specialist education consultant is currently reviewing. As you can imagine, reviewing and replying to this number of responses will take time, but we and the consultants are diligently working to respond as promptly as possible. If any responses require further time to respond, we will extend the consultation time accordingly. However, we can only make that decision once we have reviewed all of the responses that have been received.

We are committed to the consultation being pursued in a meaningful way and with the interests of our students, their families and our community at its heart. We will continue to invest time and effort into our communication strategies and plans going forward.

If a decision to proceed with the merger is taken, a separate formal TUPE consultation will follow involving staff and recognised trade unions.

Will the trust commit to being more collaborative and open with the governors, providing additional information and a full consultation process?

As detailed above, the process has been over a year in length. From the start, clear channels of communication were open including 1-2-1s with the trustees. The board and our team of specialist consultants are working through all the questions and queries. We will be meeting with the LGCs again in the first weeks of September.



What form will future local governance take, will the external and local oversight continue as a safeguard for Copley Academy and other schools in the trust?

This will come out the due diligence process. Once we understand this, we will feedback more information.

How will the values, culture and individuality of Copley Academy be protected?

From the outset GAET trustees have been seeking a possible merger with a trust that understands our principles and approaches and is willing to accommodate these as the two trusts merge. We have found the senior staff and trustees at Dixons open to this and they believe GAET can strengthen their provision as well as offer support to GAET academies.

Many of the trusts we considered were rejected purely because they were not a decent match in terms of ethos and values. The current due diligence process will compare in detail the two academy trusts and any differences will be highlighted with potential mitigation.

What exactly will Dixons take from us, and what will we genuinely gain in return?

This will come out the due diligence process. Once we understand this, we will feedback more information. Throughout, our focus is the outcomes of our children.

Dixons primarily manages secondary schools, so how will their limited experience with primary schools impact our school?

Dixons have a great success in managing and increasing performance of both secondary and primary schools; it was this experience and depth of resource which aligned to our urgent need.

Will the trust ensure that staff at all levels continue to receive trauma training to continue their ethos of being a trauma informed school?

This will come out of the due diligence process. Once we understand this we will feedback more information.

Why are staff not able to submit this form without putting their names?

We need an open and transparent consultation process, and we genuinely want to hear and respond to your questions. GAET has key values of Genuine, Respect, Excellence, Achievement and Together, which all our staff and board adhere to. At the heart of a consultation is being openly honest.

With all the other primaries being in Bradford how will this be supportive, working for a single Tameside school?

Dixons already have North West based schools, with a desire to continue to expand further in Manchester.

Are we confident that what may be lost in and/or slowed down by the process of merger and post-merger landscape is worth the potential price of that loss?

Continuing our current approach for the next four years was not considered to be acceptable and would only have seen more students fail to reach their full potential, to the material detriment of those individuals, their families and the wider community. A clear need for change within the trust has emerged, and the option of merging with another trust with a track record of successful delivery was



considered to be the most impactful and efficient way to achieve the educational outcomes that our children need and deserve.

Is there demonstrable commitment to merging ideas, practices, staff expertise and experience? To what extent has this been demonstrated in the process thus far?

This will come out of the due diligence process. Once we understand this we will feedback more information.

What are the red lines/non negotiables from our due diligence on DAT?

In any merger both parties have clear outcomes they both want from the process. Early on these were discussed and I am pleased to say we are both are in agreement and no issues arose.

New staff who have been interviewed and employed for this summer term and September were not informed of the merger, even after we were told. Some of these staff may not want to work for Dixons and have now joined a school where that might happen. How does this show trust in Dixons and GAET?

This is really disappointing and not in line with our core values as a trust. The board will ask for a full review.

Published Monday 4th August 2025

Has the GAET board been in touch with the DfE? Are they supportive?

Yes. DfE has been supporting the board for over a year, including helping with a short list of potential merger partners, and guidance around best practice and governance. They formally approved the potential merger at the North West Advisory Board on 17th July 2025. In line with the ongoing consultation, they are asking DAT, as a condition, to continue to work with our schools and fully support the provision of consultation responses. The DfE have also approved the significant change request on 24th July 2025, for both Silver Springs and Copley to open ARP provision as of September 2025. Both of these are key formal decisions and shows DfE support the trust board actions.

Published Friday 1st August 2025

What is the plan for our GAET Pioneers Partnership SCITT?

Pioneers Partnership is a strong, well regarded SCITT with a clear track record and a great deal to offer. There are no changes proposed to the Pioneers Partnership SCITT following the transfer and Dixons Academy Trust has confirmed that the name can remain in place for 3 years.

How will both trusts ensure there is transparency and no conflict of interest in the merger process?

Both trusts will ensure that the appropriate legal and governance processes are followed, in line with regulatory and legal requirements. All conflicts of interest have been and will continue to be declared and resolved.

Published Wednesday 30th July 2025

Will there be any additional costs of uniform to parents as a result of the merger?



Great Academies Education Trust

Great Academies Education Trust (GAET) and Dixons Academies Trust (DAT) are committed to ensure there are no additional costs to parents as a result of the merger.

What will happen to the GAET financial reserves as a result of the merger?

The head-room that exists within GAET's current level of reserves will be invested to support school improvement for the current GAET schools.



Published Friday 4th July 2025

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.



Great Academies Education Trust

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.



Published Wednesday 18th June 2025

What benefit is there to joining Great Academies Education Trust with Dixons Academies Trust?

A set of shared values lead 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.

What would the leadership structure be in Dixons Academies Trust?

The Trust would be led by a CEO (Chief Executive Officer). They would lead a multi-disciplinary team including the CFO (Chief Financial Officer) that would focus on ensuring school improvement and development as well as effective corporate function.

How financially secure is the MAT, what happens if one of the schools in the MAT gets into financial difficulty?

Each Trust is currently financially secure and has its own reserve. 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.

What happens if a school in the MAT has a dip in standards?

The purpose of a Trust is to provide educational support and increased capacity. The oversight from the Trust board would mean that the trust would know about possible problems at an early stage and prevent this becoming significant through interventions and increased support. However, if this happened, we would draw on existing capacity in the trust and where necessary external consultants. The benefit of an expanded MAT would be the additional resource we were able to provide for school improvement. The strength of the teaching in the schools within the MAT mean that we have a great basis to learn from each other and adapt practice in line with what is evidence based best practice.

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.

What would happen to the uniform?

We currently don't propose to make any changes to the current school uniforms of any of our schools.



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 parents and carers.

What happens next, what is the timescale of any change?

Trustees would need to consider all of the feedback and outcome of this consultation process and then meet to discuss whether they wish to proceed.

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.