

## **Consultation on a proposed merger between two academy trusts – Partnership Learning and QED Academy Trust**

### **1.0 Introduction**

- QED is a successful four-school academy trust in Hillingdon. In 2022 QED trustees reviewed their trust’s strategic direction and decided to explore various options - including the possibility of a merger, which became their preferred option.
- QED’s criteria for a merger partner were: a successful, medium-sized academy trust in London committed to delegation, with experience in primary, secondary and special education and the capacity and culture to integrate QED into their trust. QED researched a number of potential trusts and identified Partnership Learning – a 13 school academy trust with schools mainly in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham but also in Havering, Waltham Forest and Southend - as a particularly good fit as a potential merger partner. Initial contacts between the two trusts confirmed that Partnership Learning was responsive to exploring the benefits which the greater scale of a combined trust could bring.
- During the 2022-23 academic year an increasingly close relationship developed between the two trusts, including Partnership Learning providing some estate management and school improvement services for QED. The two Boards of Trustees looked carefully at the potential mutual benefits that a merger could bring and both Boards decided to take a merger proposal forward, firstly to consultation with interested parties and subsequently, subject to the outcome of consultation, to a formal application to the Department for Education.

This document sets out the opportunities for interested parties to give their views on the proposal, outlined in more detail below.

### **2.0 QED Academy Trust**

<b>Year of formation</b>	2011
<b>Current no of schools</b>	4
<b>Number of pupils</b>	3,000
<b>Range of schools</b>	Secondary (3) and Primary (1)
<b>Ofsted Gradings</b>	All Good or Outstanding
<b>Local Authority Locations</b>	Hillingdon

Since its formation in July 2011, the Trust has grown from a single academy and is now responsible for a junior and three secondary schools in the London Borough of Hillingdon.

Although each school retains its unique identity, the Trust seeks to deliver consistently high standards of education by drawing upon the shared experience of its teaching and support staff as well as executive leadership, local governors and trustees.

### 3.0 Partnership Learning

<b>Year of formation</b>	2015
<b>Current no of schools</b>	13
<b>Number of pupils</b>	10,000
<b>Range of schools</b>	Secondary (4) Primary (5) All-through (2) Special (1) and UTC (1)
<b>Ofsted Gradings</b>	All Good or Outstanding apart from two working towards
<b>Local Authority Locations</b>	Barking & Dagenham (9) Waltham Forest (1) Havering (2) Southend (1)

Since its formation in February 2015 Partnership Learning has grown to oversee thirteen schools, mainly in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham and neighbouring boroughs.

The trust's growth has been achieved through a mixture of:

- establishing new schools
- taking on and improving under-performing schools
- incorporating the strengths of existing Good or Outstanding schools

The trust believes that Local Governing Boards and Headteachers generally know best what their schools need. However, the trust also believes in the benefits of schools learning from each other and therefore actively encourages and supports collaborative innovation.

### 4.0 Trust Compatibility

As the two trusts have worked closer together it has become clear that they already share a number of key approaches to overseeing schools:

- Similar schemes of delegation to Local Governing Boards
- Wide-ranging powers and responsibilities devolved to school level, including decisions about ethos, organisation and budgets
- Adherence to national and locally-agreed terms, conditions and salary structures for all staff

### 5.0 Benefits of proposed merger

- Increased capacity to support schools, both with school improvement and back-office functions
- Enhanced opportunities to share good practice across a wider range of schools
- Complementary strengths - QED able to provide additional secondary expertise through its two strong secondary schools and Partnership Learning enhanced primary expertise to assist QED's only primary and strong SEND support via its Special School.
- Improved recruitment and retention of staff, as they would have enhanced career opportunities to progress across more schools and central services roles in a larger trust.
- Reduced average costs for central services as the trust grows – leaving more money to spend at school level.
- Additional significant annual funding for school building improvements

## **6.0 Possible Risks and Mitigations**

- Distance: Although the trusts currently operate in different London boroughs, drive times between most schools in the trusts are approximately one hour and in-person collaboration can easily be enhanced by virtual meetings. Distance has not been an issue during the past year of collaborative work between the trusts.
- Trust Cultures/Structures: Although the trusts have developed separately, working together over the last 12 months has confirmed that structures, systems and cultures are very closely aligned, including staff terms and conditions, delegated authority to schools and approaches to school improvement.

## **7.0 Proposed implementation of the merger between Partnership Learning and QED Academy Trust**

- QED would integrate into Partnership Learning. The formal process would be likely to take effect by 1<sup>st</sup> May 2024.
- For a transitional period, to ensure implementation of the merger has been fully embedded, the current Chief Executive Officer and Chief Finance Officer of QED would continue in key leadership roles within the merged trust structure.
- QED's academies would integrate into Partnership Learning. However, leadership, staffing and Local Governing Boards at QED schools would remain as current.

## **8.0 Implications for Staff**

- All current employees at QED schools would transfer across to Partnership Learning as their new employer.
- However, Partnership Learning adheres to the same national and locally-agreed terms, conditions, salary structures and pension arrangements as QED, so QED staff should be reassured that there will be no change in their current contractual arrangements. In any case, statutory arrangements for the Protection of Employment Rights (TUPE) guarantee existing terms and conditions for QED staff.
- There would be no implications for current Partnership Learning school or central staff.

## **9.0 Implications for pupils and parents/carers**

There would be no implications of a merger for pupils and their parents/carers in either QED or Partnership Learning schools (other than the benefits outlined above) because they would operate as now, under their current headteachers and Local Governing Boards.

## **10.0 Implications for Local Governing Boards (LGBs)**

Local Governing Boards in both QED and Partnership Learning would continue to operate as currently as both trusts currently have very similar schemes of delegation.

## **11.0 The Consultation Process**

### **11.1 Key Dates for the Consultation**

Consultation Period Starts: 12 noon on Friday 22nd September 2023

Consultation Period Ends: 12 noon on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> October 2023

### **11.2 Actions following on from the Consultation**

Partnership Learning and QED's Boards of Trustees will read and consider all responses received.

The trusts will produce a summary of the responses to the consultation, which will be published on their websites: [www.partnershiplearning.com](http://www.partnershiplearning.com) and [www.qedacademytrust.org.uk](http://www.qedacademytrust.org.uk)

The trusts will address comments received and will explain in the summary on their websites how they intend to take into account in their plans the comments received.

## **12.0 How to contact the Trusts and find out more**

You may find out more about the two trusts and the proposal by visiting the Trust websites:

[www.partnershiplearning.com](http://www.partnershiplearning.com)

[www.qedacademytrust.org.uk](http://www.qedacademytrust.org.uk)

or by emailing either of the Trusts, at:

[office@partnershiplearning.com](mailto:office@partnershiplearning.com)

[info@qedacademytrust.org.uk](mailto:info@qedacademytrust.org.uk)

## **13.0 Consultation Views and Comments**

The purpose of this consultation is to ascertain the views of interested parties on the proposal for a merger between the two academy trusts – Partnership Learning and QED Academy Trust.

You are therefore invited to give your views and comments on the proposal for merger and to ask any questions which you may have.

You may send your views, comments and questions at any time during the consultation period to either of the following email addresses:

[office@partnershiplearning.com](mailto:office@partnershiplearning.com)

[info@qedacademytrust.org.uk](mailto:info@qedacademytrust.org.uk)

or by post to either of the following addresses:

Chief Executive,  
Partnership Learning,  
Parsloes Avenue,  
Dagenham,  
RM9 5QS

Chief Executive,  
QED Academy Trust,  
Northwood School,  
Pinner Road,  
Northwood,  
HA6 1QN