

Frequently Asked Questions – parents and carers

1. What is the proposal?

Ark Schools and Pontefract Academies Trust (PAT) are proposing to bring together our two high performing trusts to create one larger network enabling us to build on our collective strengths and deliver an even stronger provision for our children, staff and local communities.

2. Why is PAT proposing to join the Ark network?

The PAT Board of Trustees has, over many months, been considering the next steps in the strategic development of the trust, determining from the outset that any change must unequivocally benefit Pontefract and South Kirkby children, families, and staff. The Board concluded that the best future for the trust was to partner with another where there was strong mission alignment and an equally solid track record of delivering outcomes for pupils and communities.

Ark is recognised as one of the highest achieving education trusts in the country, with a network of 39 schools; all but one is rated good or outstanding. PAT is equally successful, its strength in primary schools is exemplary and this performance will help drive further improvements and learnings in Ark's primary schools. PAT is keen to continue to build upon the strong foundations in our two secondary schools and being part of a larger trust, with significant secondary expertise, will enable us to deliver that.

We believe that bringing the trusts together will have a direct impact on pupils' outcomes and that both organisations will be stronger as a result of this partnership.

3. What are the benefits?

There are a huge number of benefits for both trusts. Larger trusts have greater resilience due to the combined resources, knowledge, and experience, as well as numerous opportunities for collaboration and the sharing of best practice and expertise.

Pupils will benefit from the experience and expertise of a larger network team and the collaboration between the two trusts. PAT has built a reputation for school improvement and high performance. Working with Ark's team brings more capacity to enhance provision, this will only positively benefit our pupils and families.

We know that the quality of teaching is one of the strongest indicators that pupils will do well, be happy and fulfil their potential. Staff would benefit from Ark's sector-leading professional development and this increased access to professional development for staff

flows through into the schools and classrooms. It improves the offer to pupils, enhancing their learning experience, as well as benefiting staff recruitment, retention and career development opportunities.

Ark runs schools across the country – a large number of which are based in London, with regional hubs in Birmingham, Portsmouth, and Hastings. The regional hubs operate as a family of schools within a locality, while enjoying the benefits of being part of a larger network. By joining Ark, we would become one of those regional hubs, retaining the PAT family of schools which continue to reflect local need, as part of a broader school network.

Who will make the final decision on the merger?

With the proposal agreed between Ark Schools and PAT, the next step is to share the plans with our school communities and wider stakeholders. We will hold meetings and circulate an online form to gather feedback and incorporate these comments into our final submission to the Department for Education (DfE).

The merger is subject to approval by the DfE Regional Director supported by the Advisory Board and we are aiming to submit the proposal for consideration before the end of the calendar year. The DfE is responsible for reviewing the proposal and the feedback received, and for approving the application.

4. When would PAT schools join the Ark network?

The plan is for the merger to take place on 1st September 2026, with the trusts working together through the 25/26 academic year to ensure a smooth transition.

5. Next steps

Date	
2 nd September – 17 th October 2025	Feedback period with all stakeholders
31 st October 2025	DfE proposal submitted to Advisory Board for consideration and approval
January 2026	Subject to approval of application - substantive transition work begins

About your child's school

1. Would PAT schools change their names?

No. The PAT schools would retain their current names and uniforms.

2. Would my child need a new uniform?

No. The uniforms at all of the schools would remain the same.

3. Would the staff in my child's school remain the same?

Yes. Staff would remain the same and from 1st September 2026, their employer would be Ark Schools.

4. Would the leadership remain the same?

Yes, school leadership would remain the same.

From September 2026, Julian Appleyard OBE, PAT's CEO, will become the Ark Director for Growth and Regional Director for the North. He will focus on the integration of PAT into the Ark network and be a member of the Ark Schools Management Team. Pam Hewitt, PAT's Chief Operating Officer, will become Ark's Head of Service Transformation, and James Hardy, PAT's CFO, will become the Regional Finance Director for the North.

5. Would all PAT schools join Ark?

Yes, the proposal is that all PAT schools would formally become part of the Ark network on 1 September 2026.

Curriculum/SEND

1. Would the school curriculum change?

Broadly speaking, our curricula would remain the same, but we will work with Ark to look for areas of innovation and improvement.

At the primary level we already use the same phonics programme as the Ark schools, Read Write Inc. We will look at the opportunity to introduce Maths Mastery, which is used in all Ark primaries, and over 500 schools nationally. There is the opportunity to introduce Maths Mastery at secondary level to provide continuity between the phases.

Our schools already use the vast majority of the same examination boards as Ark. We would look to align overtime to use the same examination boards as Ark and would follow an aligned approach to student assessments.

Through the transition process we would agree a process and timeline to ensure that any changes are introduced in a considered and sensible way.

2. Would SEND provision change?

We believe SEND provision is a huge strength across PAT. This strength has been identified in numerous Ofsted inspections in recent years. Inspectors have consistently praised the work of the trust with regards to SEND and inclusion. For example, we are very proud of the work we have implemented on inclusion, including building The Hive provision at The King's School. The Trust is well regarded by the Local Authority for its inclusive approach. We do not anticipate that our SEND provision would change, and we would continue to strive for improvements in this area.

Ark is an inclusive network, and every school offers priority admissions and specialised support to students with SEND. As a network, Ark is fully committed to ensuring that children with special educational needs are given an excellent education and they have a dedicated SEND team at their central office that supports all schools in the network. We believe the partnership would give us even more capacity to support our children with SEND.

3. Would the behaviour policies change?

No – these would remain the same.