

2 September 2025

Dear parents and carers,

Proposed joining of Pontefract Academies Trust and Ark Schools

Pontefract Academies Trust has a strong track record of school improvement. Since 2018 our schools have seen significant improvements in both secondary and primary performance, as well as in our Ofsted ratings. Our secondary schools now perform consistently above the national average and our primary schools have gone from being one of the lowest-performing nationally to among the best in the country for primary school outcomes.

Over the past year, the Pontefract Academies Trust board of trustees has been exploring how to build on our success to benefit more children, families, and staff in Pontefract and South Kirkby. Whilst we have strong outcomes for pupils and are highly ranked for performance, we believe in being even more ambitious for all our pupils. We want to take our schools further and have the ambition for Pontefract and South Kirkby schools to set the standard nationally. We believe that the best way to achieve this is to join forces with a like-minded trust. To us, like-minded means a trust that shares our values, has a strong track record in improving outcomes for pupils and is committed to the local communities that they serve.

We are pleased to inform you that Pontefract Academies Trust is planning to join with Ark Schools, combining the two trusts' expertise to deliver even stronger provision for the children, staff, and communities we serve.

Serving our communities is at the core of what we do. In exploring the proposed partnership this has been, and will continue to be, the trust's overarching priority. We also recognise that, to develop our work in schools further, being part of a larger network would bring significant educational benefits to pupils, families and our staff.

About Ark

Ark is recognised as one of the highest achieving education trusts in the country and runs thirty-nine schools across Birmingham, Hastings, London, and Portsmouth, supporting nearly 30,000 pupils. Its mission is to ensure that all children have access to a great education and real choices in life, regardless of their background. Ark chooses to work where they can make the biggest difference and has been considering growth into new regions where there is strong local leadership and a commitment to delivering excellent results.

Recognising the alignment, shared ambition, and complementary strengths, the Boards of both trusts propose a formal merger, with Pontefract becoming the founding base of a new northern hub.

The work done so far

This is not a decision that we have taken lightly, and both trusts have been in conversation to explore the feasibility of joining together for several months. We have got to know each other well and have held reciprocal visits to each other's schools and have taken a detailed approach to due diligence. As such, both trust boards have a strong appreciation and understanding of the benefits, opportunities, and risks associated with the proposed partnership and we believe that by coming together we would become greater than the sum of our parts.

Combined knowledge and experience

This partnership would enable us to retain our Pontefract family of schools while benefitting from being part of a larger network. Larger trusts have greater resilience due to the combined resources, knowledge, and experience, as well as numerous opportunities for collaboration:

- 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.
- Staff would benefit from greater collaboration opportunities, sharing teaching, support and operational expertise and best practice from a much wider network of colleagues. This enhances the provision for pupils in all schools. There is the opportunity to share ideas and resources with much bigger teams on a national level and access expertise from colleagues working in schools in similar contexts - even if not in the same locality.
- 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. This includes early career teacher programmes and teacher training which are rated as outstanding. Staff would also benefit from Ark's well recognised leadership development programmes. 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.

How would this affect you and your children?

We want to reassure you that there would be no changes to school-based staff as a result of the trusts joining. We are not proposing changes to how our schools operate or are led on a daily basis. This means the headteachers and wider school leadership, teaching, and support staff, many of whom you know, would remain the same.

Pontefract and South Kirkby schools reflect local needs, and this will continue. Our schools are embedded in the local communities they serve, and this is something we hold dear. There will be no loss of individual school identity and ethos, and schools will retain their names and uniforms.

PAT's central team and executive would become part of Ark's wider central team, with PAT trustee representation on the Ark Schools Board to ensure continuity, stability and integration between the

two trusts. Julian Appleyard, PAT's CEO, would lead the Pontefract Hub, which would become the largest regional hub in the Ark network outside of London.

Feedback and next steps

Stakeholders, including staff, parents, and our wider school community, will be invited to share their feedback over the next few weeks, which the Boards of both trusts will take into consideration before submitting the application for approval to the Department for Education (DfE).

If approved by the DfE, the plan is for the merger to take place on 1st September 2026 and the trusts will work closely together over the coming year to explore even further all of the opportunities and to ensure a smooth transition.

As part of our school community, your views are important to us, and we would like to know your thoughts on our plans. We will be holding meetings for parents and carers on **Thursday 11th September at 5.30pm**, and **Monday 15th September at 10am**, these meetings will be held at Carleton High School.

We also welcome your feedback via the [online feedback form](#). For more information, please also refer to the FAQs on our website, which we will update regularly over the coming months.

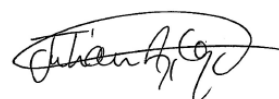
This is an important next step for our Trust. We are extremely excited about what we can achieve together with Ark to strengthen pupil outcomes further, invest in staff development, and increase our capacity to support pupils across our schools.

Thank you for your continued support.

Best wishes,



Phil Jones OBE
Chair of Trustees
Pontefract Academies Trust



Julian Appleyard OBE
CEO
Pontefract Academies Trust

Frequently Asked Questions - parents

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.