



Proposed Merger Consultation

Achieving more together

Foreword

The Board of Trustees of the Three Rivers Learning Trust and the Board of Directors of Tyne Community Learning Trust are consulting on a proposed merger of the two trusts. This is an exciting opportunity to have a larger and more resilient trust, to serve their existing schools and to benefit from great collaboration across all school phases. The benefits of a merger for students, staff, and the wider community are outlined in this publication.



The merged trust will:

- Improve and expand the learning opportunities, experience and environment for every student, supporting their educational journey and the eventual move into further or higher education, training and employment
- Increase capacity to enable investment into high-quality learning resources and expertise, further supporting students in the classroom
- Create opportunities to improve the quality of staff development, supporting our key asset by sharing best practice, and becoming an employer that attracts and retains the best talent
- Support staff workload and wellbeing, through collaborative practices, including the development and improvement of curriculum planning, assessment practices and subject knowledge
- Demonstrate real value for public money, through aligned business systems, increased powers of procurement and access to essential school condition funding to ensure a learning and working environment which is fit for purpose for students and staff alike

This consultation document outlines the key benefits of merging.

Consultation on this proposal will run from **10th February 2023**, until **17th March 2023**. Feedback received during the consultation process will be reviewed by the Board of both trusts at their respective meetings. The outcome of the consultation will be published by 28th April 2023.

Colin Pearson
Chair, Three Rivers Learning Trust

Rob Moore
Chair, Tyne Community Learning Trust



Who we are and what we do...

The Three Rivers Learning Trust

The Three Rivers Learning Trust was formed in December 2011, by three founding schools, Chantry Middle School, Newminster Middle School and The King Edward VI High School. Since then the trust has grown to eight schools, with the inclusion of Abbeyfields First School (2017); Harbottle CofE First School (2018); Thropton Village First School (2018); Dr Thomlinson CofE First School (2018) and Stobhillgate First School (2020). We anticipate that Morpeth All Saints CofE First School will join the trust in April 2023.

The Three Rivers Learning Trust is a small, well established and inclusive trust. Students range from nursery (age 3), to the Sixth Form, (age 18). We are a three tier trust, with first, middle and high schools, all located in the Morpeth and Rothbury area. Schools range from very small village first schools to large middle and high schools. Our schools are typically the schools of parental choice within their catchment areas and often from beyond. The trust currently comprises approximately 3,200 students and 444 employees.

Our combined strengths

- Very good student outcomes for all, including SEND students, at all Key Stages, when compared to national attainment and progress scores
- Well established and strong relationships across and beyond our schools, with a commitment to collaborative partnership work
- Aligned curriculum development plans, supporting transition from one phase to the next with expertise in small school structures as well as larger school management
- Expert careers advice and guidance, ensuring excellent progression routes, into further and higher education and into apprenticeships and training
- Good OfSTED outcomes for all of the schools recently inspected under the Education Improvement Framework (2019)
- Talented and experienced senior leaders and staff with excellent educational and business expertise

Tyne Community Learning Trust

Tyne Community Learning Trust was formed in September 2019 by nine schools who serve the semi-rural and rural area around Prudhoe. Many of our students begin their school lives in one of our six First schools; Wylam First, Prudhoe Castle First, Ovingham CE First, Mickley First, Broomley First and Whittonstall First. Most of our students continue into our two Middle schools; Ovingham Middle School and Highfield Middle and complete their education at Prudhoe Community High School. We embrace being part of the three tier system and value being part of our community.

Tyne Community Learning Trust is a small Trust which has worked, since its inception, to develop collaborative practices to support schools and ensure that transition from one phase to another is strong and supportive of all the students, particularly those with greatest need.

The Trust currently employs 388 staff and has a total student number of 2,256. All our schools are currently graded as good or outstanding.

- Positive staff morale and positive employee relationships, demonstrated by good staff survey results, and a strong record of staff development and career progression both within and beyond the trusts
- Strong financial systems which support school improvement and premises development, resulting in healthy reserves and good estates management practices
- Strong governance structures and systems with good communication between board and local governing bodies and similar schemes of delegated powers

Three Rivers Learning Trust

The King Edward VI High School
Current roll 1,429

Newminster Middle School
Current roll 554

Chantry Middle School
Current roll 554

Dr Thomlinson C of E Middle School
Current roll 213

Abbeyfields First School
Current roll 323

Stobhillgate First School
Current roll 136

Thropton Village First School
Current roll 44

Harbottle C of E First School
Current roll 18

Tyne Community Learning Trust

Whittonstall First School
Current roll 90

Broomley First School
Current roll 137

Mickley First School
Current roll 106

Ovingham C of E First School
Current roll 129

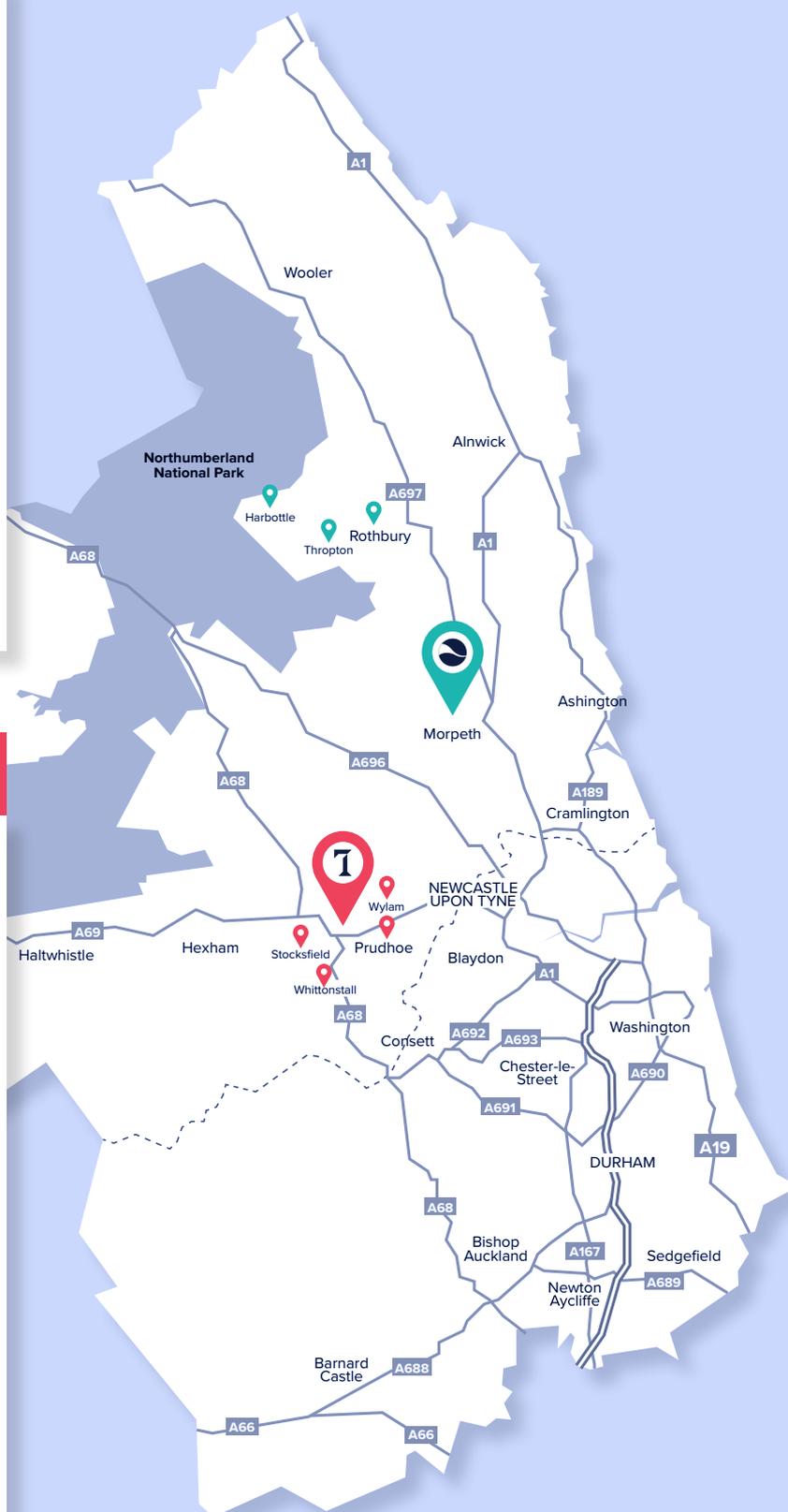
Prudhoe Castle First School
Current roll 82

Wylam First School
Current roll 143

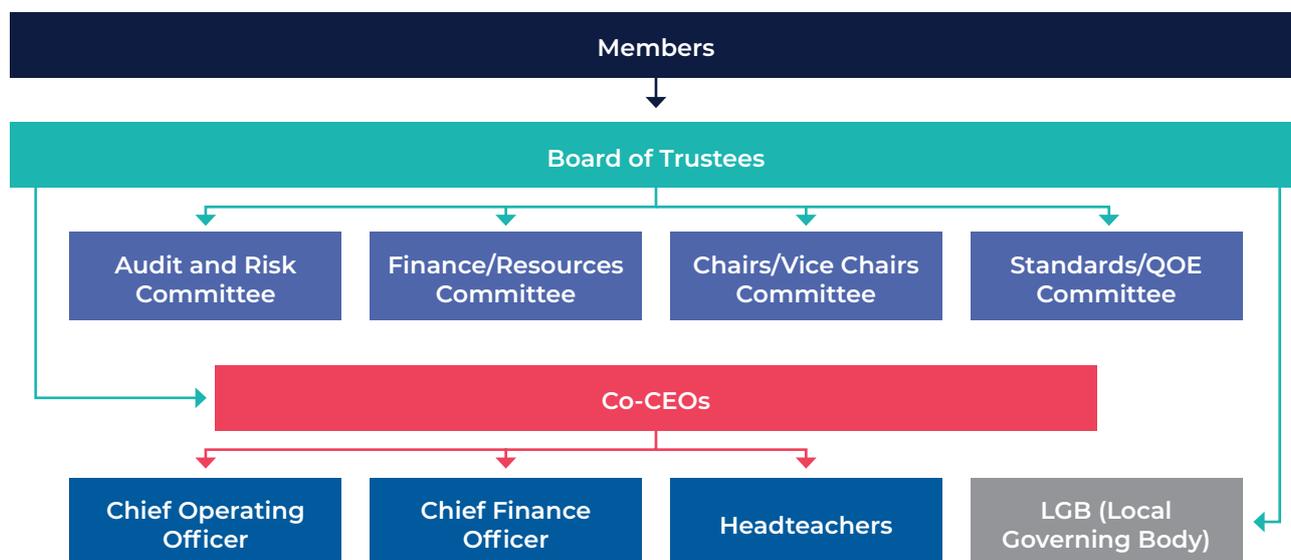
Highfield Middle School
Current roll 398

Ovingham Middle School
Current roll 334

Prudhoe Community High School
Current roll 755



Trust board



Our schools

School	Postcode	OfSTED	Headteacher	LGB Chair	Website
High Schools					
The King Edward VI High	NE61 1DN	Outstanding	Clare Savage	Linda Templey	Click here
Prudhoe Community High	NE42 5LJ	Good	Annmarie Moore	Susan McArdle	Click here
Middle Schools					
Chantry Middle	NE61 1RQ	Good	Bryan Stewart	Helen Clegg	Click here
Newminster Middle	NE61 1RH	Good	Liz Kinniment	Paul Carvin	Click here
Dr Thomlinson CofE Middle	NE65 7RJ	Good	Liam Murtagh	Sylvia Crane	Click here
Highfield Middle	NE42 6EY	Good	Richard Oades	Colin Harwood	Click here
Ovingham Middle	NE42 6DE	Good	Jenny Bullock	Steven Duckworth	Click here
First Schools					
Abbeyfields First	NE61 2LZ	Outstanding	Sandra Ford	Michael Bone	Click here
Stobhillgate First	NE61 2HA	Requires Improvement	Glen Whitehead	Louise Banfield	Click here
Thropton First	NE65 7JD	Good	Liam Murtagh Executive Head	Judith Carr	Click here
Harbottle CofE First	NE65 7DG	Outstanding	Nikki Buckley-Feiven	Paul Carvin	Click here
Whittonstall First	DH8 9JN	Good	Kelly Howe Executive Head	Catherine Bolam	Click here
Broomley First	NE43 7NL	Outstanding			Click here
Mickley First	NE43 7BG	Good	Andy Hudson Executive Head	Judith Meek	Click here
Ovingham CofE First	NE42 6DE	Outstanding		Joe Edgoose	Click here
Prudhoe Castle First	NE42 6PN	Good	Katie Jacobs	Judith Meek	Click here
Wylam First	NE41 8EH	Outstanding	Steph Gibbon	David Riley	Click here

Executive team

It is proposed that the new Trust will be led by existing executives from both organisations; Simon Taylor and Alice Witherow as Co-CEOs, Mark Tait as Chief Operating Officer and Helen Beaton as Chief Financial Officer. The Co-CEO role creates continuity of knowledge and leadership during the transition, the equivalent of 6 days a week of CEO capacity, providing primary and secondary expertise in one role and adding resilience to the Trust leadership structure in the event of any absence.

Simon Taylor

CEO, Three Rivers Learning Trust

Simon is privileged to lead the Three Rivers Learning Trust, through a period of growth and development, since its formation in 2011. He has worked in education since 1985, initially as a history teacher, and then in senior leadership positions across three very different secondary schools. In 2007 he was appointed Headteacher at The King Edward VI School, Morpeth, one of the founding schools of the trust, and became Chief Executive Officer (CEO) in September 2018. As a National Leader of Education (NLE) he also works with a number of schools across the region, to support school improvement.

Simon was recently awarded an OBE in the New Year Honours List.

Alice Witherow

CEO, Tyne Community Learning Trust

Alice has been the CEO of Tyne Community Learning Trust since its formation in September 2019 and is proud of the collaboration between the nine schools that has led to a strengthened curriculum offer, improved approaches to teaching and learning and supported staff and pupils to flourish. Alice is excited to continue this work in a merger with the Three Rivers Learning Trust.

Alice has worked in education for over 30 years, the last 20 in leadership roles. She was a Primary Headteacher in Newcastle, leading Benton Park Primary for fifteen years. During that time the school improved from satisfactory to outstanding and grew from 235 pupils to 440. Alice has worked for Newcastle Local Authority as an Associate Headteacher supporting schools in challenging circumstances and served on the Newcastle Schools Safeguarding Board, as the schools' representative. Alice sees schools as being central to the communities they serve and strongly believes in partnership working, across schools and with other sectors.

Helen Beaton

Chief Operating Officer, Tyne Community Learning Trust

After qualifying as a chartered accountant, Helen has worked in education for 30 years in Northumberland and the North East. Initially this was in funding for Northumberland Training and Enterprise Council and then the Learning and Skills Council where she worked with many colleges in the North East on their capital projects as well as monitoring the financial health of the FE sector. Helen joined South Tyneside College in 2008 where she helped improve the financial health of the college and managed more than £20m of capital improvements at the college, including obtaining funding. Helen also established the finance and operational systems of a multi academy trust sponsored by the college that had three schools by the end of 2018 as well as managing the financial, IT and data aspects of the successful merger between South Tyneside and Tyne Metropolitan Colleges in 2017. Helen joined Tyne Community Learning Trust in 2019 to again establish and manage the financial and operational systems of the Trust Helen is also a Director of the Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust and Signature the awarding body for sign language qualifications.

Mark Tait

Chief Operating Officer, Three Rivers Learning Trust

Mark has been involved in education for the past 15 years although the first 20 years of his working life was in retail banking, managing teams and service delivery. His education experience has included administration in a secure children's home, marketing in a local authority early years team, business management at Abbeyfields First School, change management in the early life of Three Rivers and now the Chief Operating Officer of the Trust. He very much enjoys working with the great people the Trust employs to continually improve the services the Trust provides to free up our educators to educate.

Central Services and Teaching School Hub

The two current Trust central services teams will become one central team serving all schools. The Teaching School Hub will be a key part of the new Trust but retain its name; the Three Rivers Teaching School Hub.



The case for change

In 2017, Steve Mumby, former CEO National College for School Leaders gave a speech on ethical leadership, in which he reframed the question “Should my school become an academy?” into a different question... “How can my school best collaborate with others in a strong and resilient structure to ensure that each child is a powerful learner and that adults have the opportunities to learn and develop as teachers and leaders.”

We believe that the answer to the second question is best achieved through the structure of a learning trust, and that it will be better achieved by merging our trusts, to form a stronger, more knowledgeable and more resilient trust.

A merger is a partnership of equals, which recognises the strengths and areas for development of each trust and outlines how we will become stronger together as a single organisation. There will be a new name for the larger Trust, symbolising a new entity of equal partners. This paper will outline how a single larger trust will enable students to achieve well and how colleagues will have greater opportunities to learn and develop, to support this aim.

The mixed MAT status of both Trusts will be retained in the new Trust which will benefit from four Church of England schools.

Context

Tyne Community Learning Trust and The Three Rivers Learning Trust have much in common. We are small three tier learning trusts, rooted in our local Northumberland communities. Our breadth of schools is similar, with small rural first schools and larger middle schools which feed a single high school. We have similar models of governance, leadership and schemes of delegation and have developed a number of collaborative cross trust partnerships and networks to support school improvement. These networks are typically led and supported by predominantly school based colleagues which provides purposeful discussion and practical action. The trust facilitates and enables these groups to develop, prioritising carefully so that the desired impact is achieved. As a single larger trust, this method of collaboration will have a greater reach, impacting more staff and students. Greater breadth and expertise will be available to our first and middle schools and a phase based partner will, for the first time, be available for the high schools.

We are both inclusive trusts, with good academic outcomes, strong inclusive pastoral practices and a focus on the holistic development of students to support their journey through the trust and in preparation for life beyond the trust.

A merged trust will build on these strengths and provide greater resilience in times of constant educational change.



Building a resilient trust



These are challenging times for schools and the delivery of high quality education. The disruption to learning caused by the pandemic, recruitment and retention difficulties across the profession and the negative impact of the cost of living crisis, all provide medium and longer term challenges. We will be better able to address these and future challenges through the creation of a stronger, more resilient and resourceful organisation, built on the values of cooperation, innovation and respect.

The Confederation of School Trusts (CST) recently published paper, [“Starting with Why: Why join a trust - and why a trust-based system?”](#) identifies four ways that strong trusts can build 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 school improvement
- Financial resilience through greater economies of scale - ability to withstand further perturbations, with reduced competing demands from other essential services
- Workforce resilience through stronger, shared cultures of career development, with pathways across schools, bolstering recruitment, development and retention of teachers, leaders and support staff

CST believes that **“it is the single governance structure that binds schools together in an enduring partnership with an obligation to work through challenges together, rather than to separate at times of difficulty”** and the strength of this arrangement is that it exists beyond individual leaders who will join and

leave trusts and schools at different stages of their careers.

The purpose of a learning trust is to provide high quality education for the public benefit within all schools and across the trust. Our ability and capacity to meet this purpose will be enhanced in the merged trust.

This will be achieved by:

- Supporting school and trust improvement through evidence based and systematic collaborative practices, typically led by school based colleagues who are enabled by trust wide systems
- Innovative learning networks which will build knowledge and expertise to continually improve teaching and learning practice and therefore outcomes for students
- Being an employer of choice, able to recruit, develop and retain excellent staff, and to develop an employee offer that provides, high quality professional learning, accessible career pathways, well developed succession plans and valued staff benefits packages
- Ensuring finance, business and operations systems provide best value, so that front line teaching and learning provision is well resourced and that central services provide effective support for students, staff and schools
- Being a reflective learning organisation, with systematic and respectful stakeholder feedback systems, which drive trust wide improvement
- Building on and enhancing the strong external partnerships each Trust already has with its local, business and education communities

Benefits of working together

Benefits for students:

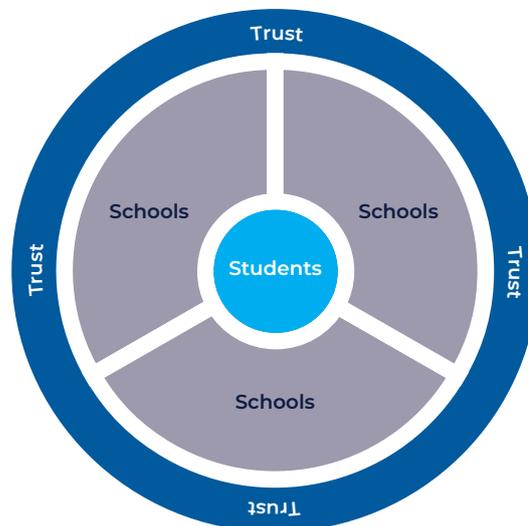
- Excellent outcomes through excellent teaching
- Innovative curriculum opportunities
- Well prepared to progress through their educational journey and beyond

Benefits for staff

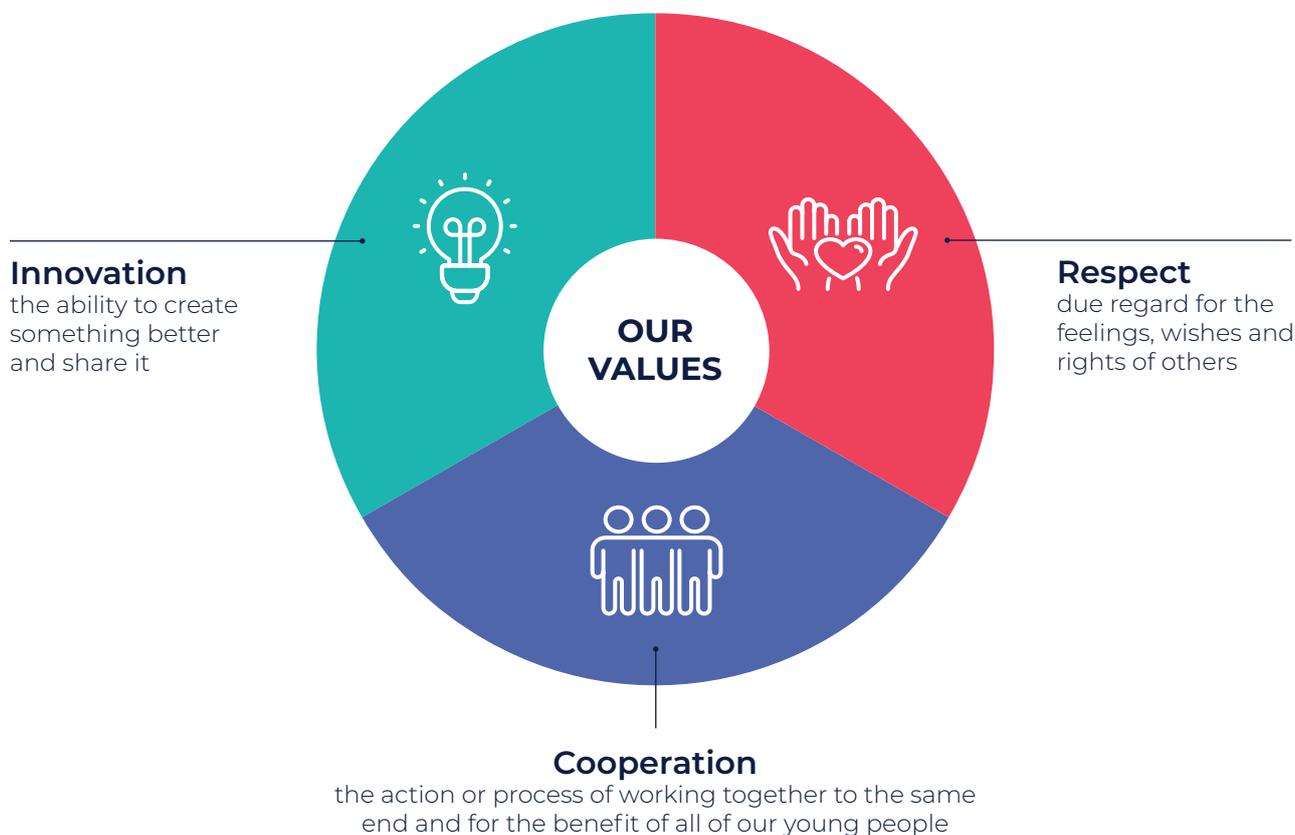
- Recruit, develop and retain the very best staff through strong professional development and collaboration
- Provide wider career opportunities within a larger trust
- Commit to staff wellbeing and work life balance

Benefits for the community

- Sustain and further developing a high quality three tier system
- A strong voice in the local and regional education systems
- Ensure a strong voice through a resilient local governance model
- The continuation of work towards Net Zero 2030



The Trust supports its family of schools and staff to thrive and enables the delivery of excellent education for our students that sit at the heart of our organisation.



Proposed timeline

September/October 2022

Due Diligence

Due diligence looks at the position of both Trusts through a financial, educational, capacity, premises and HR lens to ensure that all information about all schools is considered. Reported to the Boards of both trusts in October 22.

November/December 2022

Leadership and Governance considered and DFE approval given

Independent HR consultant appointed to advise board on executive structures. Application made to the Regional Director to approve the merger. Focus groups with Headteachers and Central teams.

Members meeting to decide on board appointments.

January/February 2023

Informal and Formal Consultation

Informal focus groups to support the vision and values of the new organisation. Formal consultation with key stakeholders, staff, parents and governors from 10th February, 2023, until 17th March, 2023. Informal discussions with Unions.

March/April 2023

Consultation outcomes considered by Boards of both Trusts

Formal consultation closes mid March with boards considering this and deciding to move forward in April 2023.

May/July 2023

Legal and HR processes completed - Final merger agreement

Tupe process and legal transfer work takes place.

September 2023

Newly merged organisation

Merger completed.



Summary

As a single, larger three tier trust we will be an outward facing, inclusive, innovative and resilient organisation, delivering high quality education and supporting children and young people on their educational journey, preparing them well for life beyond the learning trust. Schools will retain their identity and ability to innovate and will remain anchored within their local community. Collaborative practices, within and across all phases, will strengthen and share this work widely, supporting staff across the trust to deliver the best possible education, for students and for the public benefit.

Consultation meetings - staff and parents

27th February	4pm: Staff Consultation Rothbury	Dr Thomlinson, Rothbury
	6pm: Parent Consultation Rothbury	Dr Thomlinson, Rothbury
1st March	4pm: Staff Consultation TCLT	PCHS, Prudhoe
	6pm: Parent Consultation TCLT	PCHS, Prudhoe
7th March	4pm: Staff Consultation Morpeth	The King Edward VI High, Morpeth
	6pm: Parent Consultation Morpeth	The King Edward VI High, Morpeth

Consultation meetings - governors

8th March	5pm: Prudhoe Governors	PCHS, Prudhoe
9th March	5pm: Rothbury Governors	Dr Thomlinson, Rothbury
15th March	5pm: Morpeth Governors	The King Edward VI High, Morpeth

How you can engage with this consultation

Please let us know your views regarding the proposed merger between The Three Rivers Learning Trust and Tyne Community Learning Trust. Visit: www.the3rivers.net/consultation or www.tcltrust.org/consultation/ to complete the feedback form.





www.tcltrust.org

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www.the3rivers.net

Call us: +44 (0) 1670 515415
Email us: info@the3rivers.net

We value your view on our proposal set out in this document. We will carefully consider the responses to the consultation exercise and take account of views expressed in any representations received. We will publish a summary of the consultation and make the summary available to any person who requests it.

If you require a printed copy of this document or the document translated into other languages please contact info@tcltrust.org or info@the3rivers.net.