



MAIDEN ERLEGH
TRUST

TARGET 10,000

A strategy for the growth and development of
Maiden Erlegh Trust 2025-2030

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Introduction

Maiden Erlegh Trust (the MAT) was established in 2014 when Maiden Erlegh School in Reading was approved to open. In the twelve years to follow the Trust would expand to eleven schools serving communities from Bracknell Forest to West Berkshire.

A key element of this measured, incremental, growth was the preparedness to support the improvement of schools of concern but also to extend into phases of education for which the Trust did not historically have a reputation for supporting. The strategic decision to act on our values and to become a truly inclusive organisation has added richness and diversity to our offer and adds immense value to our proposition in the view of our stakeholders.

This document has therefore been prepared to outline how Maiden Erlegh Trust aims to grow and develop over the next five years, noting that circumstances beyond our control may either support or hinder progress against this plan.

What is our vision?

Our vision is to develop a diverse, inclusive, and collaborative community of highly effective schools that deliver excellent educational opportunities for the children and young people of the communities we serve. Through our work we will ensure that they are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and behaviours to deal with the demands of an ever-changing world.

What are our core values?

Aim High



Be Inclusive



Work Together



Aim High succinctly captures our fundamentals of high expectations and high aspirations for all – our staff, our children and young people, and our wider community. It asks all our stakeholders to be the best they can be, to view the world through a positive lens and to be continually ambitious for themselves and others.

Be Inclusive is the foundation upon which our vision and values are built from, in everything we do and every decision we take.

Work Together demonstrates our commitment to team and others over self where collaboration and partnership with all stakeholders underpins how we operate and why we exist. Working together to ensure that the children and young people who attend one of our schools, and also more broadly in the communities we serve, has the very best experience and leaves us ready to take their next steps in the world.

Why do we want to grow?

One of the organisations five strategic pillars is '**Growing and Developing our Community**' which outlines our commitment to be outward-facing and accept the responsibility we have, as a strong Trust, to the sector more widely.

We aspire to grow our organisation to enable us to serve with more breadth, depth, and quality. As we grow, we will be able to deliver meaningful benefits to more children, staff, and communities by strengthening educational quality, providing structural stability, and enhancing opportunity across our schools. We will be able to share expertise and best practice more widely and direct our resources more efficiently and effectively, ensuring that children benefit from consistently high standards, broader curricula, and enhanced pastoral support, improving life chances for all.

For our children and young people, a larger, values-driven organisation allows us to **aim high** for our children and young people so that they leave us armed with the knowledge, skills, and behaviours to move onto the next stage of their lives as confident and positive contributors to society.

For our staff, a larger, values-driven organisation creates richer professional development pathways, stronger peer networks, and greater capacity to innovate, improving recruitment, retention, and morale. We will **work together** to create a culture that promotes collaboration and aspiration and that rightly recognises the critical value of high-quality teaching and support staff and its positive impact on the learning environment.

For our community, a larger, values-driven organisation allows us to **be inclusive**, acting as a stable civic partner, investing in local relationships, inclusion, and long-term improvement, while maintaining strong school identities rooted in their communities. In this way, sustainable growth enables our organisation to amplify its impact while remaining focused on improving life chances for all learners.



What is the perspective of the Department for Education (DfE)?

As of June 2025, the latest data set available, the number of pupils educated in schools had **decreased** by 32,033 pupils to 8,408,276 since June 2023 which supports the notion of a general downturn in pupil numbers nationally.

Furthermore, changes in the average number on roll show a falling roll at Primary level, an increasing roll at Secondary level. Notably, however are the relative increases in NOR at Special and PRU establishments in the same period.

Change in Pupil Numbers 2023 to 2025

Phase	Pupils 2023	Pupils 2025	Change
Primary	4,647,851	4,554,974	-92,877
Secondary	3,630,171	3,671,427	41,256
Special	149,096	165,232	16,136
PRU / AP	13,191	16,643	3,452

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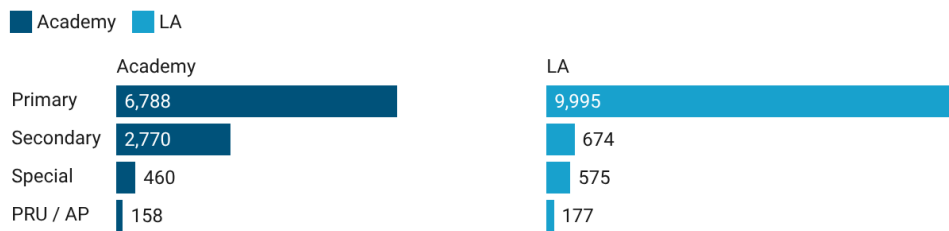
Change in Average NOR 2023 to 2025

Phase	Pupils 2023	Pupils 2025	Change
Primary	277	272	-5
Secondary	1,054	1,062	8
Special	144	156	12
PRU / AP	39	50	11

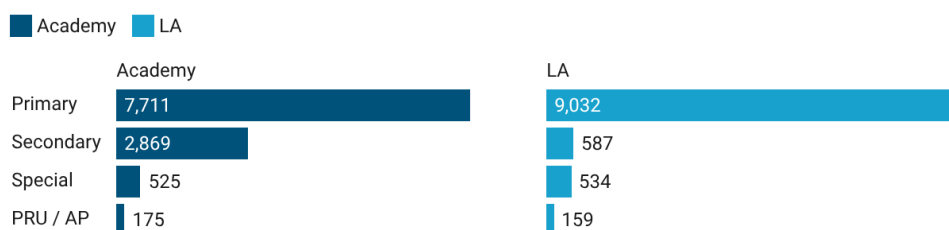
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In the same period, there were 5 fewer schools overall. It is notable, however, that LA maintained schools continued to academise but there remains a significant distortion in the proportion of Primary schools (46.1%) versus Secondary schools (83%) that have become academies.

LA Maintained and Academy Schools (June 2023)



LA Maintained and Academy Schools (June 2025)



<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>

In June 2025 there were 1,104 more academy schools than there were in June 2023 and notably, new secondary and special schools offset the closure of 40 primary schools across the country. Of the 10,580 academy schools, 430 Primary and 544 Secondary academies operated as SATs (9.2%). The total number of SATs dropped by 106 (9.8%).

When the previous Schools White Paper was published in 2022, it was the Governments stated ambition that all schools “*will be on a trajectory to either serve a minimum of 7,500 pupils or run at least 10 schools.*” by 2030, noting that Trusts “*...typically start to develop central capacity when they have more than 10 schools.*”

What problem is the DfE trying to solve, and how can we help them do that?

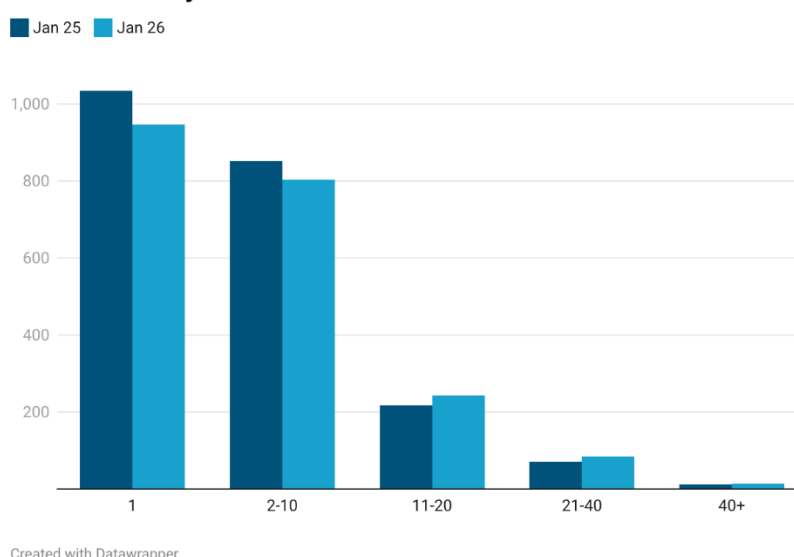
The DfE is seeking to ensure that all children attend a good school, make good progress, attain well, and have a suitable destination at the end of their school career.

Whilst the Government have not determined a strong preference for the structure of the school system, they have indicated their preference that all schools should be part of a group of schools, working together for the benefit of their local communities. This position signifies an acceptance that groups of schools, working together, are best placed to deliver the high and rising standards expected through the Government's own 'Opportunity Mission'.

The DfE will inevitably be looking to reduce, overall, the number of MATs in the sector, by encouraging SATs to join MATs, and supporting proposed mergers of current MATs, in recognition that larger groups of schools are better able to withstand the funding and operational challenges that are facing the sector now, and in the future.

In January 2025 there were 1,152 MATs and 1,034 SATs. By January 2026 this had changed to 1,146 MATs and 946 SATs. This indicates that SATs are joining MATs but also that MATs are merging to become larger as the overall number of MATs has declined over the year.

MATs January 2025 v 2026



Alongside this, sector bodies including the Confederation of School Trusts and NGA have published specific guidance to support Trusts in managing the merger process, indicating that this policy is of increasing prevalence across the sector.

DfE perspective of 'strong trusts'

In May 2021 the DfE published [Building Strong Trusts](#) – guidance for academy trusts and prospective converters which was written to support maintained schools looking to form a trust, join a trust and also those existing trusts seeking to grow. The guidance outlines the Department's vision for 'every school to be part of a family of schools in strong academy trusts.' The Schools White Paper, published in March 2022, codified this vision further by stating that *'By 2030, all children will benefit from being taught in a family of schools, with their school in a strong multi academy trust or with plans to join or form one.'*

Whilst many of the commitments made in the White Paper are now not being taken forward by the current Government, there appears to be little appetite for other political parties to reverse the academisation agenda. The fact that the Department does not have the benefit of the legislative levers it might ideally like to pursue its aims at a faster pace, its ambition for all schools to be part of strong trusts remains.

In April 2023 the Department published their [Trust Quality Descriptors](#) which developed further the ideas published in the School White Paper of March 2022. These descriptors outline the areas that Regional Directors will consider when assessing Trusts' ability to grow and impact the system more widely.

The descriptors are:

- High Quality and Inclusive Education
- School Improvement
- Workforce
- Finance and Operations
- Governance and Leadership

These descriptors, alongside other frameworks such as the [MAT Assurance Framework](#) give the Trust and Executive leaders the tools and guidance with which to assess their organisations capacity to grow and drive school improvement at scale, and the demonstration of both capacity and capability in the view of the Regional Director will be key to the organisation achieving its growth ambition.

What does the Regional Director consider when making decisions about growth?

Fundamentally the Regional Director and the Advisory Board members will want to be assured that the Trust has sufficient capacity to take on new schools without there being any unintended impact on its existing schools. As a result, they consider proposals carefully and carry out extensive due diligence on both the school(s) aiming to join and on the Trust itself. Whilst most of the due diligence pertaining to the Trust is ongoing through regular engagement and published information, we must also be able to demonstrate, for each project:

- The capacity of the Trust to drive improvement at scale and sustain this over the long term through interrogation of the Trust's school improvement philosophy, strategy and the capacity and expertise that exists (or planned) to deliver it.
- The extent to which there is alignment in vision and values – do the community support the proposal?
- The extent to which there is, or could be, a geographical connection and whether there are existing Trusts operating in the area that might be a better fit or whether the introduction of a new Trust may be welcomed.
- The Trust's financial capacity through interrogation of both the Trust and Schools medium term financial data and assumptions.

- The Trust's operational capacity through interrogation of its shared service systems and processes.
- The governance structure including the capacity and expertise of the Trust Board and the approach to ensuring local governance is integrated within the structure.

The Regional Director has a remit to implement the ambition that all children are taught in a family of strong schools but has relatively few legislative powers to secure that ambition. Therefore, nurturing the relationship with the Regional Directors office alongside consistent demonstration of strong performance and outcomes is imperative to the organisation achieving its growth ambition.



What are Maiden Erlegh Trust looking to achieve?

Maiden Erlegh Trust's ambition to grow to 10,000 pupils by 2030 reflects a deliberate and principled response to the changing education landscape. This target is not driven by scale for its own sake, but by a clear assessment of the capacity, resilience and infrastructure required to sustain high-quality education, meet increasing regulatory and financial pressures, and fulfil our responsibility as a civic, place-based trust.

Operating at greater scale brings important financial and operational benefits. As funding becomes increasingly constrained and cost pressures intensify, growth enables the Trust to achieve economies of scale by spreading fixed central costs — including finance, HR, estates, digital infrastructure and governance — across a larger pupil base. This reduces per-pupil overheads, strengthens financial sustainability and allows a greater proportion of funding to be directed towards teaching, learning and pupil support. A trust of 10,000 pupils is also better positioned to diversify and manage financial risk, providing stability when individual schools experience short-term pressures and enabling strategic investment in leadership capacity, school improvement and infrastructure.

Educationally, growth supports the Trust's core mission to deliver consistently high standards and inclusive provision. Increased scale will allow Maiden Erlegh Trust to sustain strong trust-wide professional networks, specialist leadership roles and structured development pathways for staff. This enhances collaboration, supports recruitment and retention, and strengthens leadership succession — all of which are critical to long-term educational quality. Scale also makes it more viable to develop and sustain specialist and inclusive provision, including enhanced SEND capacity, alternative pathways and enriched curricular opportunities, ensuring that a wider range of pupil needs can be met locally.

Reaching 10,000 pupils will further strengthen Maiden Erlegh Trust's role as a system leader. Trusts of this scale have the capacity and credibility to contribute meaningfully to place-based planning, working in partnership with local authorities, other trusts and regional bodies to support sufficiency, inclusion and school improvement. This aligns growth with our values and ensures that expansion strengthens local education ecosystems rather than fragmenting them.

While evidence does not point to a single "optimal" trust size, it consistently shows that effective growth depends on strong governance, clear values and disciplined execution, not scale alone. Maiden Erlegh Trust therefore views growth as a strategic enabler, not an outcome in itself.

By pursuing growth with purpose, Maiden Erlegh Trust aims to secure long-term sustainability, deepen educational impact and remain a strong, values-driven organisation capable of serving current and future generations of pupils.

What will our growth look like?

It has been a strategic imperative to grow as we have so far, welcoming schools from all phases and specialisms, in line with our values.

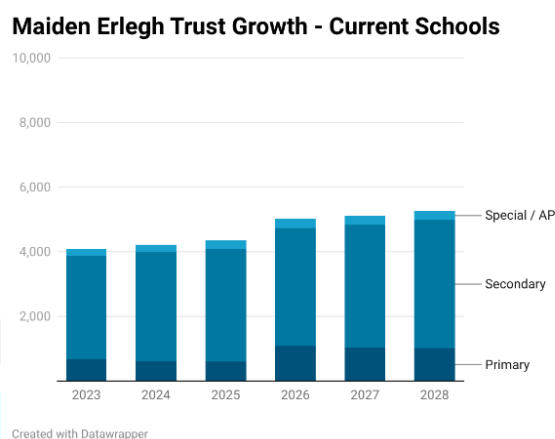
Given the context of our organisation, significant thought has been given to how we might look to structure our growth plan in terms of:

- Number of children and young people
- Number of schools
- Type and phase of school
- Geographical location
- Method of growth
- Organisational structure

Number of children and young people, number of schools, type and phase of education

Based on Maiden Erlegh Trusts existing schools, numbers on roll will peak at 5,400 pupils in 2028 (5,700 by 2030) as the growth of River Academy is offset by declining pupil numbers across our existing primary schools which is a feature both regionally and nationally owing to the declining birth rate.

The Trust must therefore consider growth through all available means if it is to achieve its strategic ambition of education 10,000 children and young people within the planning period.



The opportunities for growing and developing our community within our existing LA partnership areas is increasingly limited. Primary schools make up the vast majority (85%) of the remaining LA maintained, or single academy trust schools and these schools have an average number on roll of 307, with the remaining secondary schools having an average number on roll of 1,278.

The opportunity exists to partner with Secondary SATs as they are already academies. That they remain as single academy trusts, however, would indicate that there would be barriers to overcome.

SAT / LA Maintained by Phase	Primary	Secondary	Special / PRU	Total Number of Schools	Total Number of Pupils
Bracknell Forest	10	1	-	11	5,140
Reading	22	2	1	25	10,763
West Berkshire	26	3	1	30	10,230
Wokingham	9	2	2	13	5,022
MET Current LA Areas	67	8	4	79	31,155

Single Academy Trusts and LA Maintained Schools (no VA/VC) – January 2026

Geographical location

Place is a critical organising principle in the sustainable growth of a multi-academy trust. Although the education system is national in structure, the realities of education provision are fundamentally local. Schools are shaped by the communities they serve, including local demographics, patterns of deprivation, labour markets, housing, transport, and access to public services. A MAT that understands the distinctive characteristics of a place is better positioned to design support, improvement strategies,

and operating models that reflect real need rather than applying generic solutions. This local intelligence strengthens decision-making and improves the likelihood of sustained school improvement.

Growing a MAT within a defined geographical area also brings important operational and educational advantages. Place-based growth enables closer collaboration between schools, more efficient deployment of shared services, and stronger professional networks among leaders and staff. It reduces the risks associated with over-dispersed growth, such as stretched capacity, inconsistent school improvement, and weakened accountability. By anchoring expansion within a locality or region, a MAT can ensure that growth remains coherent, manageable, and aligned to its improvement capacity.

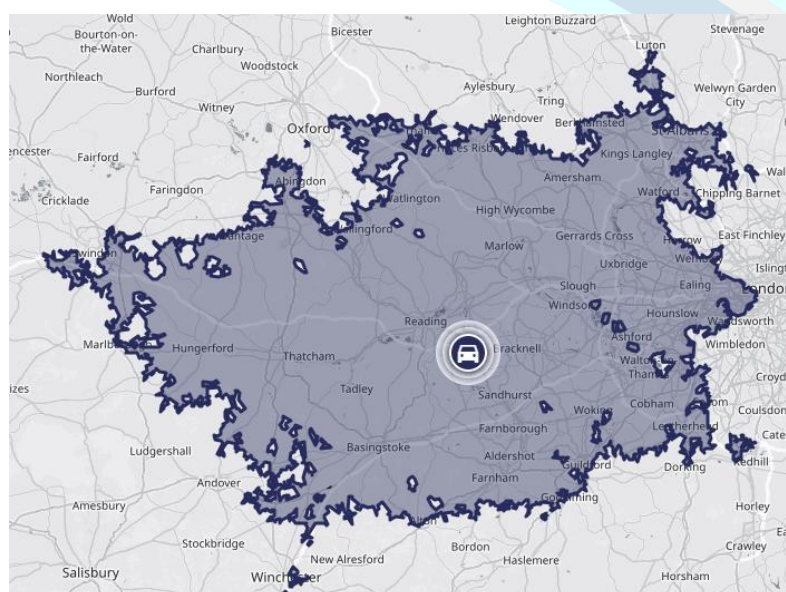
Place is equally important in building confidence and credibility with schools considering joining a trust. Governing bodies, leaders, staff, and parents need reassurance that a MAT understands their context and is committed to the area for the long term. A trust with a strong local presence can demonstrate a track record of improving schools in similar circumstances and a deep understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing the community. This place-based identity supports trust-building and strengthens the likelihood of successful integration and long-term stability.

Effective partnerships are also inherently place-based. Multi-academy trusts increasingly work alongside local authorities, dioceses, further education providers, employers, health services, and other public and voluntary sector partners. These relationships are essential in addressing issues such as inclusion, attendance, safeguarding, and workforce development. A MAT that is embedded within a locality is better able to align its work with wider system priorities and to contribute meaningfully to collective solutions that extend beyond individual schools.

The growing policy emphasis on system leadership and local responsibility reinforces the importance of place. Trusts are increasingly expected to act as local anchors, supporting school sufficiency, inclusion, and collaboration across an area. Place-based data and insight allow MATs to identify patterns of need, target intervention effectively, and develop inclusive strategies that respond to local pressures. By adopting a clear place-based approach to growth, MATs strengthen their capacity to improve schools, serve communities, and contribute to a sustainable and resilient local education system.

It has, and will continue to be, a deliberate decision to seek to grow in the communities that we already know and that are readily accessible by central school improvement and shared services teams.

Locations accessible within 1 hour:



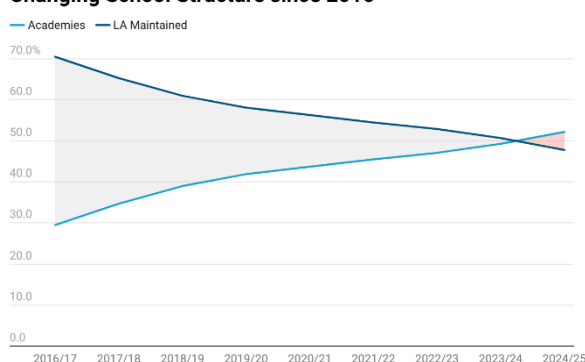
Method of growth

Organic growth

Organic growth is the method by which Trusts grow by welcoming schools following a period of mutual engagement, support, and collaboration.

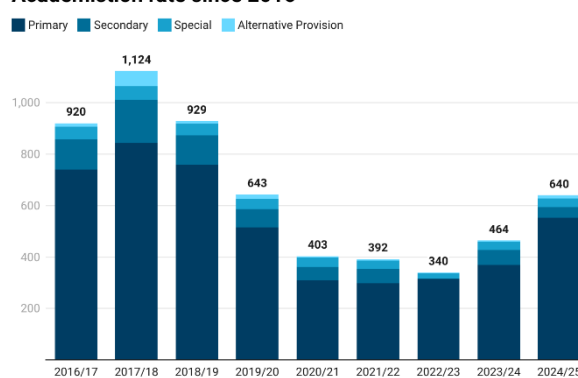
Although there has been a steady increase in the proportion of schools that have become academies, the rate slowed significantly from the 2017/18 peak as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and is only just reaching pre-pandemic levels. Only in 2023/24 did the proportion of academies become greater than LA maintained schools. Whilst this trend is continuing the rate of academisation has been inevitably impacted by external factors, such as the pandemic, but also as a result of political and policy shifts over the past five years.

Changing School Structure since 2016



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Academisation rate since 2016



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Given the limited opportunities for organic growth that exist within our current LA areas the Trust might legitimately look to grow into other LA areas that are within our preferred travelling distance.

The addition of two further LA areas, Slough and Windsor and Maidenhead provide an additional 32 schools and a further 18,172 pupils. Of this number, 6 are Secondary SATs and 4 are Primary SATs.

SAT / LA Maintained by Phase	Primary	Secondary	Special / PRU	Total Number of Schools	Total Number of Pupils
Bracknell Forest	10	1	-	11	5,140
Reading	22	2	1	25	10,763
Slough	6	2	-	8	7,296
West Berkshire	26	3	1	30	10,230
Windsor and Maidenhead	17	5	2	24	10,876
Wokingham	9	2	2	13	5,022
Opportunity Areas	90	15	6	111	49,327

Pupil numbers as of January 2025 census

Organic growth remains a key method by which trusts can scale however it cannot be relied upon in isolation to achieve the strategic growth ambition.

School improvement partnerships and Sponsorships

Developing and nurturing relationships through the demonstration of our capacity and capability to support schools (and Trusts) on their improvement journeys provides the strongest evidential foundation upon which potential future incremental growth can be anchored. This encompasses, primarily, the work of the Maiden Erlegh Institute in all its outward-facing activities, from the provision and delivery of high-quality training programmes through to specific school-to-school support requests, whether they are directly commissioned by schools or through the DfE [RISE programme](#).

It will continue to be important, therefore, to remain responsive and flexible to any local opportunities that materialise as a result of directive academy orders for schools in which we can demonstrate the capacity and expertise to support them to rapidly improve.

Trust partnerships

[Trust Partnerships](#) have been proposed as a route to helping schools join MATs and increasingly, as maintained schools are looking into joining a MAT this vehicle is being considered with increasing regularity.

This approach allows for schools to benefit from working with the Trust with a view to joining in a 12-18 month period. Often called a 'try-before-you-buy' model, it allows for relationships to be formed on a more practical and ongoing basis and for the school to benefit from the Trusts offer in real time. Case studies of schools taking up the offer of a Trust Partnership are not widespread primarily because the majority of benefits can only be realised once the school is fully assimilated into the Trust.

Free school development

The organisation has a strong reputation for developing new free schools and this remains a viable option to grow, as and when local opportunities present themselves.

The primary limiting factors with this method are the Departments policy on new free schools, having [cancelled a significant number of free school projects](#) in December 2025 in order to direct funding towards creating additional SEND places.

A further limiting factor is Local Authority demonstration of need in the context of national falling pupil numbers, the data supporting need in our localities, the identification and application process and then the time taken from approval through to the school becoming a full community, which can take 5-8 years depending on the project. At present, Local Authorities are seeking to reduce school capacity, not increase it.

Whilst the Trust benefits from specific expertise in this method of growth there is currently not a viable local pipeline of opportunities for new school development other than to meet new-build housing need. Where these have been identified, the Trust will engage with partners at the appropriate time.

Mergers

The Trust are open to considering growth routes that are both scalable and sustainable within an increasingly constrained education system. While organic growth through individual school conversions and potential free school opportunities remains important, a local merger with another academy trust represents a viable and strategically coherent option to accelerate growth while strengthening long-term capacity.

A merger would enable our organisation to achieve immediate and material growth in pupil numbers, helping close the gap between current scale and the 10,000-pupil target within the strategic planning period. In contrast to incremental school-by-school expansion, a merger provides certainty of scale and allows for planning with greater confidence around future organisational capacity, governance and infrastructure.

From a financial and operational perspective, a merged trust would benefit from economies of scale. Further consolidation of shared services functions across the larger merged organisation would reduce duplication and improve cost efficiency, freeing up resources for reinvestment in teaching, learning and school improvement. Increased scale also strengthens financial resilience, enabling the resultant organisation to better manage risk, absorb cost pressures and invest strategically in leadership development and specialist provision.

Educationally, a merger aligned to our values would enhance our ability to deliver consistently high-quality provision across a wider geographic footprint. By combining complementary strengths with a partner trust, the opportunity would present itself to broaden curriculum pathways, expand subject expertise, and further strengthen professional development networks. This would support the Trust's commitment to strong outcomes for all pupils while building leadership depth and succession capacity — both critical to sustainable growth and ongoing success for our children and young people, our staff, and our community.

A larger footprint also enhances our role in place-based system leadership. A local merger would support stronger collaboration with local authorities, other trusts and regional partners, enabling MET to contribute more effectively to meeting local sufficiency, inclusion and improvement priorities. This would serve to reinforce our collective reputation as a stable, high-capacity education organisation and strengthens strategic influence within the regional education system.

However, merger activity carries inherent risks that must be actively mitigated. Cultural alignment is paramount: any prospective partner trust must share our ethos, educational priorities and commitment to community-focused provision. Robust due diligence — including cultural, educational, financial and governance assessment — is essential to ensure alignment and long-term compatibility.

Operational complexity presents another risk. Integration of systems, structures and ways of working can place pressure on leaders and staff if not carefully phased. A clear, sequenced integration plan — prioritising safeguarding, compliance and educational continuity — will be critical to ensuring that growth does not dilute quality or destabilise existing schools.

Financial risk must also be managed through comprehensive due diligence, ensuring that liabilities, estates issues and contractual obligations are fully understood prior to merger approval. Strong governance oversight and transparent reporting will be essential throughout the process.

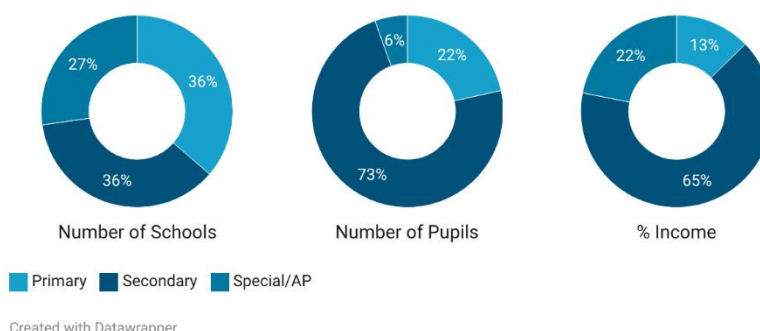
Finally, stakeholder confidence is central to success. Clear, consistent communication with staff, parents, communities and partners will help maintain trust and ensure that the rationale for merger is understood as a means to strengthen, not dilute, local education provision.

A carefully planned, local, merger offers a credible and effective pathway to achieving our 10,000-pupil growth ambition by 2028, while strengthening financial resilience, educational quality and system leadership. When underpinned by strong due diligence, cultural alignment and disciplined execution, a merger should be viewed not simply as a growth mechanism, but as a strategic lever for long-term impact and sustainability – focussed on our core object to advance education for public benefit and in the best interests of our local community.

Organisational structure

As our organisation has developed since 2014 it was a strategic decision to grow into all phases and specialisms in line with our values. Consequently, the Trust has developed a coherent, phase-specific 'hub' model that allows the tailoring of our school improvement approach to each phase but allows for that to be leveraged for the benefit of all.

Our Schools, Number of Pupils, and % Income (2025)



Given the context and structure of the Trust the strategy of developing a hub-based approach based on school phase/type has already been considered as the most appropriate structure through which to develop our organisation. This approach recognises the challenges that exist and the opportunities that are prevalent in schools of the same phase/type and allows for more nuanced approaches to collaboration across a hub of like-minded establishments.

It also allows for the wider organisational structures to be considered in this context and is relevant to the provision of school improvement support and also the provision of shared services which can be aligned in centres of excellence and competency, delivered at best value, and are accessible.

As and when the Trust grows into new areas, consideration can be given as to whether this structure remains the optimal approach or whether we would need to consider some element of regionalisation as can be evidenced in many of the larger Trusts.

Conclusion

Maiden Erlegh Trust's ambition to grow to 10,000 pupils by 2030 is grounded in a clear-eyed understanding of the national education landscape and a deep commitment to our values. This strategy recognises that growth, when pursued with discipline and purpose, is not an end in itself but a means of securing long-term educational quality, organisational resilience and wider system impact. In a period of increasing financial constraint, demographic change and policy uncertainty, standing still is not a neutral option. Thoughtful, values-driven growth enables the Trust to remain sustainable, inclusive and effective for the communities it serves.

Central to this strategy is the principle that growth must never compromise the quality of education experienced by pupils in our existing schools. Maintaining high standards, strong outcomes and inclusive practice across all phases will remain paramount. The Trust will therefore continue to prioritise leadership capacity, robust governance, and disciplined financial planning, ensuring that expansion is matched by the infrastructure, expertise and support required to deliver improvement at scale.

The Trust's place-based approach to growth reflects our belief that schools thrive when they are part of a coherent local system. By growing within communities we understand and can serve effectively, Maiden Erlegh Trust strengthens collaboration, deepens partnerships and builds credibility with stakeholders. Whether through organic growth, sponsorship, partnerships or carefully considered mergers, each opportunity will be evaluated against our values, our capacity and our long-term strategic objectives.

Risk is an inherent feature of growth, particularly in an evolving and pressured education system. The Trust will therefore continue to adopt a transparent and proactive approach to risk management, ensuring that cultural alignment, financial sustainability and operational readiness are rigorously assessed at every stage. Clear communication with staff, parents and communities will remain essential to maintaining confidence and shared ownership of the Trust's direction.

Ultimately, Target 10,000 reflects Maiden Erlegh Trust's commitment to aim high, be inclusive and work together — not only within our own schools, but across the wider education system. By growing with purpose and integrity, the Trust seeks to extend its positive impact, strengthen local education provision and ensure that more children and young people are equipped to thrive in an ever-changing world.