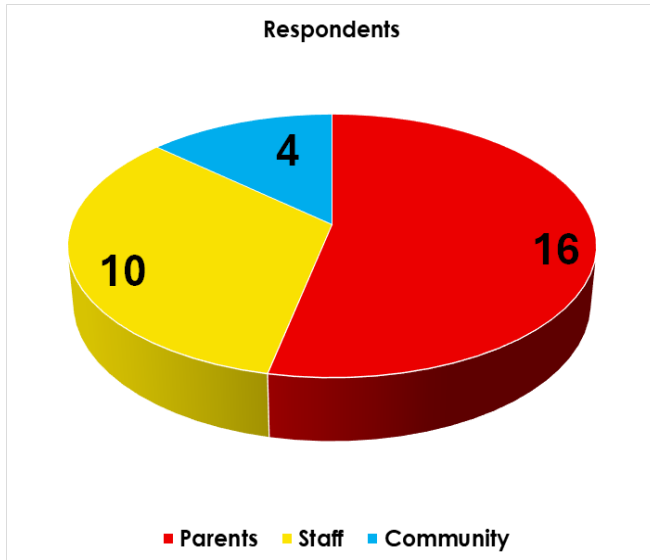


We want to give a huge thank you to all the parents, staff, and community partners who have taken the time to respond to our consultation. We have read every single comment, and your feedback is incredibly valuable.



We consulted over 3000 stakeholders, including parents, staff, local councillors and MPs, Richmond Primary and Secondary Heads, Achieving for Children and other local community groups. Coombe Academy Trust carried out a similar consultation with their stakeholders, and the Department of Education is aware of the proposed merger and consultation.

During November, face to face-to-face meetings were organised where feedback and concerns could be raised, and a consultation email address has been available to send in further comments.

The consultation is now closed.

You have told us that you understand the reasons for the merger.

You told us your biggest worries are about the specialisms, including Therapy, within our schools being taken away and if money and resources intended for our pupils would be used in mainstream schools.

You have also given us your thoughts and wishes for how Auriga Schools can expand their offer for your children.

There are more answers to some of your questions in the [Consultation FAQs](#) and [Proposed Unified Provision Charter](#) documents.

The aim of this document is to answer those frequent and additional questions as clearly as we can. This is the third update

Our Reassurance to All Stakeholders (Updated 01/12/25)

We've heard your concerns, and we want to be very clear about the following:

- For parents of children at our special schools: This is not about "diluting" the specialist provision your child needs. Your child's school will continue to be a centre of excellence, and its funding and resources, including therapy, will be protected.
- **This also means that the Therapy provision (and other specialist input) within your child's school cannot be taken away by CAT schools.**
- For parents at Coombe mainstream schools: This merger is not about turning those schools into "SEND-only-focused" school. It's about strengthening the high-quality mainstream education pupils already receive, whilst improving our support for *all* children.

The goal is for both types of schools to learn from each other, share best practices, and support our whole community. We believe this collaboration will achieve significant benefits for children and young people in Kingston and Richmond.

What Will Stay the Same?

- ✔ Your child's school's name, uniform, and individual identity.
- ✔ Your child's school designation and character.
- ✔ Your child's school's admissions, school day times, and term dates.
- ✔ Your child's Headteacher; they will continue to lead the school and be your main point of contact.
- ✔ Your child's school's Local Governing Body, which includes parent representatives.

What Will Change?

- ▶ A single Trust Board will be created to oversee all the schools, with members from both current Trusts. New trustees will be appointed based on the skills we need.
- ▶ A combined leadership team will be led by Esther Brooks as CEO (current CEO of Coombe Academy Trust), with Ivan Pryce (current CEO of AAT) as Deputy CEO, ensuring experience and knowledge of successfully running special schools remains within the executive leadership team.
- ▶ Our central support teams (like finance, HR, and IT) will work together to provide stronger, more efficient support to all schools.
- ▶ Over time, all schools will benefit from shared training and resources.

Why was the consultation information so positive?

We understand that some stakeholders felt the consultation materials emphasised benefits without discussing challenges. Our intention was to share the Trust Board's considered view after a thorough process, not to present a 'done deal.' It would not have been right for the Trust Board to go to stakeholders not knowing if the proposal was in the interests of Auriga Schools.

Auriga has spent several years exploring options for growth and sustainability. After discussions with other special schools, it became clear that organic growth was not possible, as those schools did not wish to join any Multi Academy Trust.

We met with several trusts and carefully assessed where a merger would risk losing our identity or fail to deliver benefits. Coombe Academy Trust demonstrated a strong and purposeful desire to work in partnership, and we believe the benefits will be mutual.

The Trust Board only shared this proposal after satisfying itself that it is in the best interests of our schools, pupils, staff, and community. We also recognise that any merger brings challenges and we are committed to managing these openly and effectively.

We will continue to communicate regularly, listen to feedback, and ensure that the unique ethos and specialist provision of our schools remain at the heart of this process.

We have provided a short summary below from the consultation questions raised.

1. Your Child's School

Will my child's school name, uniform, or logo change?

No. We are committed to this. Our formal agreement (called the Unified Provision Charter) states that all schools will "retain their distinctive character, name, branding, and community identity".

Will my child notice any changes to their school day?

No. There are no plans to change the school day, timetables, or term dates.

The staff, including Leadership, at your child's school will not change because of this merger.

School Behaviour Policies will remain focussed on the pupils who attend that school: special schools will not adopt mainstream behaviour expectations and policies. Mainstream schools will not adopt the expectations and policies of the special schools.

2. Money & Funding

How will you protect our special school's budget from being spent on mainstream (or vice-versa)?

This is a really important question.

- Money for children with Special Educational Needs (SEND), such as from an EHCP, will *only* be spent on the support for that child or for the specialist provision it's intended for. This includes funding for Therapy.
- In short, the funding for special schools and mainstream schools will remain unchanged by the merger. It is the development of greater efficiencies through centralised services and purchasing that will reduce costs in the longer term.
- We have been clear that there will be no staff redundancies as an immediate result of this merger. Nobody can give guarantees that there will never be redundancies in the future as the financial pressures on schools and local authorities continue. Where we can, we will want to release money to go directly to supporting pupils. We will only identify detailed efficiencies in the longer term.
- All staff in Auriga and AAT schools will transfer under their current pay and conditions, including those rules associated with progression within Main and Upper Pay Ranges and from MPR to UPR.

We want to make clear that neither Auriga or Coombe need to merge for financial reasons. Both Trusts are financially secure and have accounts audited independently. Our balanced, 3-year budgets are sent each year to the DfE for checking.

How will you pay for the costs of the merger (like legal fees)?

These one-off costs will be paid from the central office budget. Money is set aside for this kind of work every year.

3. Leadership & Your School's Voice

Will our school still have a say in its own running?

Yes. Each school will keep its own "Local Governing Body" (LGB) to provide local focus and oversight. This group will still include parent representatives.

Will our school have to follow a standard, one-size-fits-all curriculum?

No. The Charter guarantees that all schools will "retain autonomy over curriculum design and delivery." Our special schools need to provide a curriculum that meets the needs of the pupils who attend that school and, as now, continually adjusts that curriculum as children's needs change. The benefit is that schools can choose to collaborate and share great ideas, but they won't be forced to.

Will Headteachers and leaders have to spend time focussing on the other schools?

Headteachers are responsible for their own schools and that won't change. Where there are opportunities for heads and other school leaders to work together and learn from each other, this will be for the benefit of their pupils.

Will parents have a voice on the new, overarching Trust board? Your voice is mainly represented at the local level.

- Parent Governors will continue to be elected, by parents, to every Local Governing Body.
- The Chairs and Vice Chairs of these local bodies will meet regularly with the main Trust Board Chairs to share insights and feedback from their schools.
- The new Trust Board will be formed from both existing boards based on a skills audit. Some of the make-up, based on that skills analysis may include a Trustee appointed for their skill and this person may also be a parent.

4. Teaching, Quality, and Support

How will this merger *actually* help my child's learning?

Whilst Auriga Schools provide specialist training for our staff, our pupils can benefit from mainstream approaches that we can adapt. Learning about those approaches from mainstream staff who have a level of training and expertise that we cannot provide, supports us to ensure we are always using the most up to date and appropriate techniques and approaches. Our goal is to provide "wider curriculum knowledge" and "enhanced learning experiences by sharing the best ideas, specialist skills, and resources from all our schools, we can create opportunities that a single school couldn't offer alone. We also work with local universities, other school trusts, and specialist advisors to keep improving our teaching.

How will teachers be supported?

We plan to create even better professional development opportunities. This will allow teachers and support staff to collaborate, share what works, and develop new skills (especially in supporting children with SEND). Better supported and trained teachers mean better teaching for your children.

Staff in Auriga Schools receive specialist training in order that they can help our pupils learn best. We need our staff in our schools and will not move them to mainstream schools, unless there is an opportunity that individual members of staff wish to follow. Joining with Coombe will enable those staff to continue to develop without us losing their knowledge and experience completely. Similarly, we will be able to support mainstream staff who wish to learn more about working within a special school.

The proposed merger will not reduce opportunities for staff to advance their careers. Indeed, it will create more opportunities for a wider range of professional development and potentially working in a wider range of schools.

Auriga Schools have a proud reputation of being active in Richmond school communities and networks, not only with those mainstream schools we are co-located with. A merger will not change our engagement with Richmond's schools and SEND communities.

What Happens Next?

- The consultation period officially ended on 1st December 2025.
- All the feedback from parents, staff, and the community will be formally reviewed by both Trust Boards.
- This feedback will be a key part of the final decision on whether to apply to the DfE to merge. That decision will be taken before the end of term.
- The DfE will consider our application in January or February 2026. If the merger is approved, the earliest it would take place is September 2026.
- We will keep you updated via emails and through the schools' and the Trust's websites.

We trust this update has been helpful and has answered your most important questions.

Thank you for your feedback on the proposed merger, it is much appreciated