

AST / GEP Merger Summary of Public Consultation Feedback

Background:

A public consultation into the proposed merger of AST and GEP was carried out from 1st to 31st March 2021.

Key stakeholders (e.g. parents, staff, unions, leaders of local schools) were provided with information regarding the proposed merger and were asked to provide feedback. These stakeholder groups are believed to include ~15,000 individuals.

A 'frequently asked questions' page on our website was updated to reflect questions that were submitted during the consultation period.

Online 'Q&A' sessions were held for staff each school, and for the GEP central team.

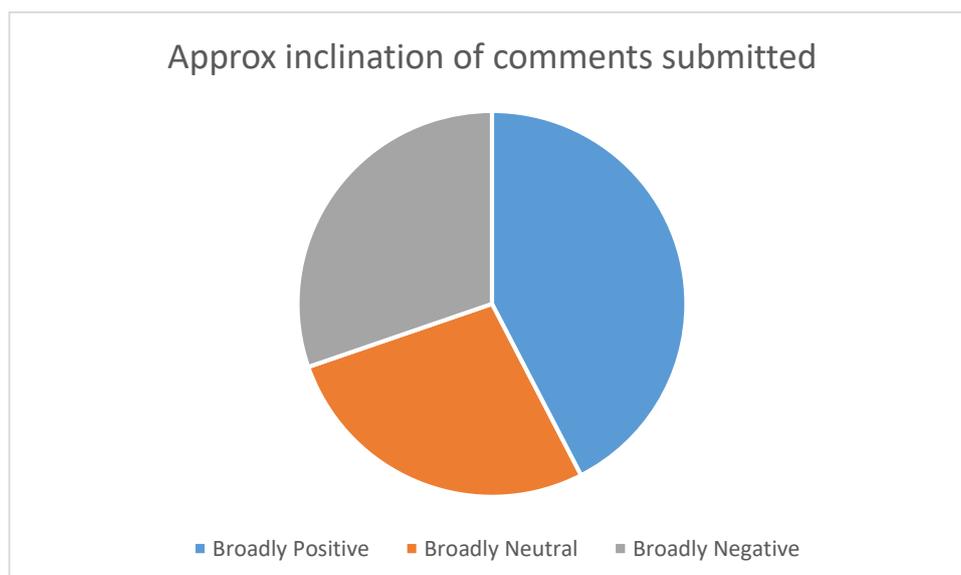
Consultation Feedback:

33 consultation responses were received via the online form. This represents a very small proportion of stakeholders consulted (approx. 0.2%), suggesting that the majority of stakeholders do not hold a strong opinion on the proposal.

When reading the following analysis of responses, it is important to remember that the number of responses was very small, and therefore observations may not be statistically significant.

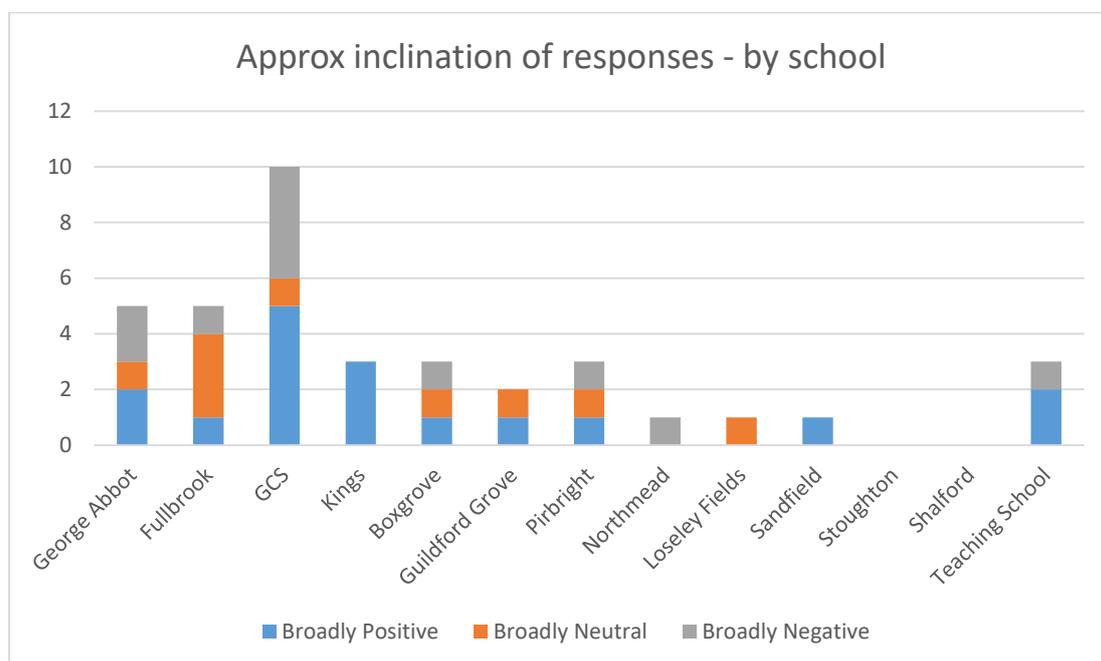
16 respondents identified as a member of staff; 18 identified as a parent (note that these choices are not mutually exclusive).

Approximately 42% of comments were broadly positive; 27% were broadly neutral, and 30% were broadly negative:



Comments were received from individuals connected with most schools; as might be expected, more comments were received from the larger schools. The only 'outlier' in responses was GCS, which received twice the number of responses of any other school despite being only the third largest.

There was no school which is linked to a significantly negative set of responses; in most cases, the responses linked to each school were approximately balanced. The graph below shows a summary of responses linked to each school (note that some responses are included twice, as respondents were linked to more than one school).



Key themes raised in feedback

Trust Background

- Is this the right timing for a merger?

Impact on Pupils

- Potential to benefit children and families across Guildford
- Children of staff should not be prioritised for places at any school (this would distort applications across Guildford)
- Does the merger create a 'monopoly' of schools in Guildford, resulting in less choice for families?

Impact on Schools

- Competition between schools can be beneficial
- Important that HTs retain the ability to make decisions relating to their school
- Important to ensure that all schools benefit, including those on the geographic periphery (e.g. Fullbrook)
- Will a larger trust become impersonal?
- Don't lose the unique characteristics of individual schools
- Important that merger improves efficiency, rather than increasing central bureaucracy
- Having a broader range of schools in the trust will be beneficial
- Will the merger result in less money in schools?
- Opportunity for schools to share expertise and support each other
- Will support services be invested in, to ensure that they are able to support a larger trust?

Impact on Staff

- Staff should not be asked to work in schools other than their own
- Merger will open up wider CPD opportunities and better outcomes for pupils
- Not all staff consider that current trust support (e.g. CPD, educational support) adds value
- Has a detailed due-diligence process taken place to identify the risks of the merger?

Next Steps

- Does the Department for Education approve of the merger?

Please see related section from Frequently Asked Question document to see our response.