



PONTEFRACT

ACADEMIES TRUST

5 April 2019

Dear Parent/Carer,

Having been in post for twelve months now, I would like to take this opportunity to write to you in order to provide a flavour of our work within Pontefract Academies Trust. First of all though, I would like to thank you for your ongoing support of our eight schools. It means a lot to the Heads of School and staff as they work tirelessly to educate your children and young people.

The Trust is on a journey to improve our schools and as a result there have been changes over the last twelve months. The reality is that the achievement of pupils in the primary schools in the Trust has been on a downward trend since 2015. I am sure that you are aware that Carleton High School was placed in special measures back in 2017. It is the Trust's moral and professional responsibility to address this historical under-performance. Whilst we cannot change past results, we are doing a lot with current pupils and their progress. With that in mind, it was very pleasing to see that Ofsted recognise the work that the Trust is doing in this regard. We recognise that implementing change and dealing with the historical position can mean something of a bumpy road but that should never stop us. It is this moral dimension that must and will drive the work that we do in our schools.

Below you will find information on some of the most essential updates for you as a parent/carers:

Governance

We have reviewed how local governance was working across our schools. Working with Trustees and Chairs of local governance, we have made changes that have now been in place since January 2019. Each school in the Trust now has a School Performance Review Board. The role of the Board is primarily to provide independent challenge to the leadership of the school in respect of pupil performance, the quality of school experience and what the school intends to do to improve performance and the school experience. The Trust has recently held its first Trust-wide governance seminar and the feedback from members of the School Performance Review Boards has been very positive. There is a clear Scheme of Delegation for each school which shows what responsibilities have been delegated to the School Performance Review Boards by the Board of Trustees. School Performance Review Boards meet termly; members have individual responsibilities, for example, monitoring SEND or safeguarding in the school.

Trust and School Leadership, and Ofsted

There have been a few changes in leadership this term. The King's School have appointed current Deputy Head, Mr Dominic Pinto, to be Acting Head of School. Our Executive Director of Secondary Education, Mr James Franklin-Smith, has spent a significant proportion of leadership time at the school and will continue to support Dominic and the Senior Leadership Team in the coming months. De Lacy Primary School is currently being overseen on a day to day basis by Mr Tom Fay, a member of the Executive Leadership Team, supported by Dr Andrew Morley, our primary lead. This bolstered leadership support for the school from the Trust will continue until a replacement for Ms Sharon Daly is announced.

Several of our schools have been in the Ofsted inspection window. It was excellent to see the very positive comments about leadership in most recent Ofsted inspections and reports for Trust schools in March. Halfpenny Lane Junior, Infant and Nursery School was given a "good" grading in recognition of the work that has been done to improve the school. Congratulations to Mr James Parkinson, Head of School, and his team who were praised by Ofsted as follows:

"The head of school has worked successfully to raise expectations and create a culture where all pupils can thrive."

"Leaders, including those responsible for governance, are passionate about their school and share a united vision of securing high achievement for pupils."

It was also very pleasing to see the work of the Trust recognised by Ofsted:

"The trust has recently appointed new leaders and governors, who have brought about much-needed improvements. The chief executive officer of the trust, primary executive and executive director of teaching and learning have worked effectively with the head of school to raise expectations and improve teaching."

"The trust knows this school well. Effective support has helped the head of school to bring about rapid improvements to teaching and learning."

Orchard Head Junior, Infant and Nursery School, and, The Rookeries Junior, Infant and Nursery School have also been inspected this term. It is encouraging to see that Orchard Head has been graded "good". Mr Joe Mitchell, our new Head of School, has had immediate impact since his arrival in January:

"Since taking up post in January 2019, you have wasted no time in identifying what is working well in the school and what needs to improve further."

The Orchard Head report highlights that meetings with Governors and the Trust during the inspection concluded that all are "united in their ambition to ensure that the school continues to improve."

As I alluded to earlier in this letter, the Trust has historic poor results in some of its schools. The recent Ofsted report of The Rookeries highlights this with its "requires improvement" judgement. The report comes as no surprise to the school and the Trust. Ofsted's findings were fully anticipated. The focus of the school and the Trust's leadership is firmly about the future and the school has many strengths on which it will build:

"Pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare is a strength of the school."

"Leadership of the early years is strong, and teaching is effective."

"Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including those with a hearing impairment, are well supported by adults and most make good progress."

In line with the other inspections it is pleasing to see the work of the Trust recognised in the report:

"Newly appointed trust leaders have been instrumental in securing early improvements to the quality of teaching."

The Trust and school need to continue these early improvements and accelerate progress.

Carleton High School continues to make strong progress under the excellent leadership of Mrs Jo Cross. Ofsted have praised the changes the Trust had made, commenting that much has been achieved in a short period of time. I am delighted with current progress which is effective and sustainable and also that our investment in staff and the physical learning environment is impacting positively on the progress pupils are making.

Systems and Processes

Vicky Beer CBE, the Regional Schools Commissioner for Lancashire and West Yorkshire, visited the Trust earlier in the academic year. She was very positive about the progress the Trust is now making in addressing the historic underperformance.

She felt that our investment in leadership, teaching and learning, and how our schools now formally collaborate is starting to have impact. I was most encouraged by her view that our approach to resolving legacy issues is both sensible and reassuring.

Like Ofsted, she was pleased with the developments and improvements for what she agreed is a new dawn for the Multi Academy Trust. We have some exciting challenges ahead and are determined to get all of our schools to the highest standard possible. To have recognition from Ofsted and the Regional Schools Commissioner about the new impetus of the Trust and the performance of its staff is highly encouraging, but there is much still to do.

Benefits to the schools

I've already mentioned the investment in teaching and learning, and leadership in the Trust. The core team of specialists in the Trust work daily with all of our school leaders and their leadership teams. In addition to this, schools in our Trust can now take advantage of all the expertise in each other's schools. Our schools now work very closely. Not only do all of our school leaders meet weekly, our secondary staff at Carleton High School and The King's School meet weekly to follow joint training on teaching and learning. This is in addition to the fortnightly meeting of all Maths and English Co-ordinators, and SENCOs in our primary schools. There is far much more to share with you than I can do in one letter, but I hope that you appreciate that bringing teachers together, sharing resources and aligning teaching and learning models is what we have focused on since September. The Trust-wide school improvement model has been built this year so that we can better diagnose and respond far quicker to pupils' learning needs. The bringing together of our workforce as one team across our schools allows us to provide the best quality education to your child. For our staff, we ensure that we invest properly in training and their development. To this end our middle leadership teams, newly qualified and recently qualified teachers are all part of Trust-wide development programmes.

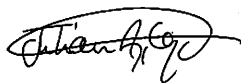
A 3-16 Curriculum

The Trust's unique makeup consisting of two secondary schools and six primary schools presents an opportunity for us to take a holistic approach to pupils' education across both phases. This will ensure a smooth transition, which builds on previous progress. I am delighted to say that leaders have been working together to develop an exciting curriculum for all our Key Stages (Years 1-11). This has involved a new reading strategy that has recently commenced in our primary schools which we will be showcasing with parents very shortly. Our leaders are looking at how the work done in secondary is mapped against the work covered by pupils in primary. This means our teachers from primary and secondary coming together to plan a learning that is sequential and over time builds up the skills and knowledge that pupils need which then prepares them for the next step in their education. This is far easier done through our unique make up as a Trust that has six feeder primaries feeding into our two secondary schools.

I hope that this update has provided insight into the journey that our schools are on. There is still plenty of work to do but I am hugely appreciative of the hard work, dedication, and support of all the staff who work across the Trust and, of course, your support as parents.

I wish you all an enjoyable and relaxing Easter break.

Yours faithfully



Julian Appleyard OBE
CEO