



PONTEFRACT

ACADEMIES TRUST

19 July 2019

Dear Parent/Carer,

I last wrote to you at Easter with an update on our work within Pontefract Academies Trust. Once again, I thank you for your continued support for our eight schools across the town. I know through my time in schools just how much leaders and staff value your support.

My earlier update detailed the journey that the Trust has embarked on over the last twelve months. This journey has been focused upon our moral and professional responsibility in addressing the drift in primary school outcomes that have been on a downward spiral since 2015. Additionally, there has been a huge focus upon working to remove Carleton High School from the 2017 special measures judgment. I reported at Easter that whilst the past published outcomes cannot be reversed, we can do much with current pupils and their progress. Therefore, I am delighted to share some of the outcomes and progress made in the areas outlined above.

SATs Outcomes – the best performance for each school and the Trust

I am delighted to let you know that all primary schools in the Trust achieved huge improvements in their key stage two SATs results. The results are the best that each primary school has ever achieved in their history and by a considerable distance.

The table below summarises the key measure for primary schools which is the percentage of year 6 pupils that meet the national expected standard in reading, writing and maths. The national average for this measure is 65%. Last year the Trust achieved 53% and this year the figure is 77% - a 24% improvement. This takes us from well below national average for our primary schools to well above in a twelve-month period. There will be few Trusts nationally that have that level of trajectory.

Reading, Writing and Maths Combined Outcomes

School	2018 Outcomes % (National average 64%)	2019 Outcomes % (National average 65%)	% Improvement between 2018 & 2019
Carleton Park	53.3	90.6	+ 37.3
Halfpenny Lane	58.6	84.2	+ 25.6
Orchard Head	60.0	77.3	+17.3
De Lacy	15.2	52.0	+36.8
The Rookeries	71.0	74.0	+3.0
Larks Hill	62.1	86.7	+24.6
TRUST OVERALL	53.3	78	+25

The headlines include:

- Carleton Park is now the 2nd highest attaining school of the 101 in the Wakefield local authority. Last year it was 79th. It is also the highest attaining school for Maths outcomes out of all of the primary schools across the Wakefield local authority.
- Halfpenny Lane is now the 9th highest attaining school in the Wakefield local authority - it was 57th in 2018.
- Larks Hill's combined outcomes for meeting the national expected standard in reading, writing and maths has placed the school as the 4th highest attaining school in the local authority – it was 47th last year.
- De Lacy has seen the achievement rise from 15% to 52%. To place that in context seven children last year achieved the national expected standard in reading, writing and maths. This year the number has increased to 23.
- The Rookeries has its best-ever outcomes to reinforce their consistent above national average performance.
- Orchard Head have enjoyed a 17% improvement to be well above the national average figure.
- Across the six primaries in the Trust combined outcomes in reading, writing and maths has placed the Trust 12% points above national average compared to being 12% below last year.

These outcomes reflect the efforts of our hardworking children, teaching and non-teaching staff and the valued support we receive from parents and carers. It is great that more children in the town at the end of Year 6 can look forward to entering secondary school with a strong foundation of core skills and an increased confidence to maximise the opportunities that secondary school brings.

Ofsted – Larks Hill, Carleton High School and Carleton Park

Three of our schools have been in the Ofsted inspection window and we are delighted with the outcomes. It is rewarding to see the very positive comments about school leadership in most recent Ofsted inspections and reports for Trust schools in July.

Larks Hill was given a “good” grading in recognition of the work that has been done to improve the school. Congratulations to Mr Ian Shuttleworth, Head of School, and his team who were praised by Ofsted as follows:

“Classrooms buzz with excitement and activity. The school’s ethos of developing pupils’ skills by cooperating and supporting each other permeates the school.”

“Every child should be the ‘very best version of themselves’ is modelled through high expectations of what they can achieve.”

“Pupils enjoy the wide variety of sporting activities on offer. They talk with excitement about competing in the ‘inter-house cup’, which they all have a role in.”

“Leaders ensure careful monitoring of pupils’ progress, which focuses on each individual pupil.”

“Pupils are confident to contribute to class discussions and debates. Some pupils participate in public speaking events organised by the school.”

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

“The school has worked with trust leaders to ensure a relentless focus on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.”

“Leaders, supported by the trust, have developed a curriculum that enthuses and excites pupils.”

As I alluded to earlier, Carleton High School was placed in special measures in 2017. A team of Ofsted inspectors visited the school on 4th and 5th July 2019. Due to the timing of the inspection and Ofsted’s summer break, the report cannot be published until after the holiday period. However, the school and the Trust are confident that the report will read extremely well.

We understand from preliminary comments that the report outcome should mean the town no longer has a secondary school in special measures. All pupils and parents and carers will have access to the report as soon as we have the green light from Ofsted. I am delighted with the stunning progress made by the school over the last twelve months. The strategies that we have deployed and the investment in people has transformed the school for the benefit of our young people.

Carleton Park J&I School was also subject to a two-day inspection on 10th and 11th July. Again, due to the timing of the visit and the summer break, the report by Ofsted will not be published until after the summer break. Again, we are confident that the report will read extremely well and, again, all pupils and parents and carers will have access to the report as soon as we have the green light from Ofsted.

Trust appointment

I am pleased to inform you that Gemma Smith has now taken up post at De Lacy Primary School. I am sure that all parents and carers will wish Gemma all the very best in taking over the reins at the school. Parents and carers will be aware that Mr Tom Fay, a member of the Executive Leadership Team, has overseen the school on a day to day basis. Tom will continue to have an office at De Lacy whilst carrying out his leadership role across the Trust.

Sport across the Trust

We have been asked about sports provision across the Trust and I am able to provide a brief update. The Trust made the decision earlier in the year to appoint Kate Wood to the role of Primary PE, School Sport and Well Being Co-ordinator. This was the first time that the Trust has appointed someone to this type of role on a permanent basis. I know that several parents and carers have met Kate over the course of the term. The feedback on the surge of sporting activities across our primary schools has been very positive. The uniqueness of the Trust with schools in proximity has allowed a greater range of events and activities to take place. We are keen for this to continue. In the same way that the schools send regular newsletters, the second edition of the primary sport newsletter from Kate will be sent before the end of term so please keep an eye out for it.

Sport continues to be a focus in our secondary schools and we value the positive impact it can have on our young people. The quality and range of activities at Carleton High School is much improved and their teams are becoming more competitive. These foundations will be built on further in September with the arrival of a new Head of PE. At The King's School it has been another very successful year with many successes in team and individual sports. Staff there are building on this strength and September will see the launch of our rugby and netball academies in Year 7 where students will benefit from specialist coaching.

Joint working

I spoke with a small group of parents and carers recently who were interested in how the schools in the Trust now work together in a formal way. I've mentioned previously the benefits of having a core team of experts in the Trust that school leaders can make good use of. In addition to this, schools in the Trust family can take advantage of the expertise in each other's schools.

The amount of joint working is not only substantial but now the norm with leaders and staff at all levels meeting weekly to share good practice.

Across primary schools all Maths and English Co-ordinators, and SENCOs have aligned their work through regular meetings. The outcome of the alignment has brought us much needed consistency of practice and that is what Ofsted are now seeing when they inspect us. Obviously, there is much more to the joint working that can be shared in a short update. However, the idea is a simple one – we bring professional teachers together, share resources and have an aligned model for school improvement and teaching and learning.

The joint working has extended to common exam syllabi and assessment and reporting. By schools no longer operating in isolation from one another and by sharing the same systematic approach, our aim is to ensure that all pupils, irrespective of their post code have access to the best education possible.

The most important asset in a school is the quality of our teachers. We are lucky to have a strong workforce. However, given the national shortage of teachers, we are working hard to bring new teachers into schools. We are happy to be a strategic partner with the New Collaborative Teaching School Alliance based at New College. We also are developing our recruitment and retention policy and practices so that we attract and retain the best teachers. Working across a Trust that shares and aligns in the way I describe above is a factor in attracting the best staff for your son/daughter. It means that any teacher, newly qualified or experienced, are not isolated in their classroom or school but take advantage of formal collaboration.

The reading strategy and the new curriculum

Parents and carers across our primary schools will be familiar with the launch of our reading strategy that kicked off earlier in the year when we showcased the plans in a series of parent and carer sessions across primary schools. Leaders across the Trust and our primary staff co-constructed the approach to reading. Reading opens or closes doors to pretty much everything in life – it sets you up. Put simply good readers do well at school and poor readers do not. Therefore, common sense dictates that focusing upon reading will allow our children to have improved life chances. In the Trust we have been implementing a three-pronged reading strategy to ensure that our pupils get the most out of their reading sessions. Collectively we want to teach our pupils to not just read lines but read between and beyond the lines. Now every pupil in our primary school reads for at least 80 minutes per day. This is broken in to:

- Reading for pleasure - the books they want to read for a reason
- Reading for purpose - the texts we must read for a reason
- Reading for productivity - a combination of the above to develop skills and knowledge

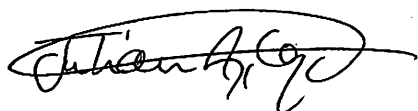
Next academic year our primary pupils will be exposed to a 'Literary Canon' - a hand-picked selection of books and poems that will immerse our pupils in a thematic curriculum model. We are very excited about the work we have undertaken in developing the strategy and look forward to it being fully embedded from September under the leadership of Tom Fay.

I hope that this update has provided insight into the journey that we started twelve months ago. There is much happening across the Trust – far too much to incorporate in one letter. There is still plenty of work to do and I would emphasise here that we are always humble and recognise that we might not always get things right. Where this is the case each school is keen to hear from you directly so that we can bring about the further improvements in our work which are so important to you and us.

Finally, let me say that 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 and carers.

Have a great summer.

Best wishes,



Julian Appleyard OBE
Chief Executive Officer