



CEO Briefing

SCHOOL YEAR 2019/20
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This will be my final, 2 page briefing of the 2019-2020 academic year, and I'm pretty sure it will involve very different reflections to the ones I've written before and any that will come hereafter. At least, I hope that's the case!

It is almost impossible for COVID-19 to not be *the* defining issue of this school year, but it's important (and actually, quite difficult) to remember that we had a typical autumn and early spring, and September 2020 may very well be far more routine than any of us could have predicted back in late March.

Our Multi Academy Trust has been through big structural changes in this academic year: we've grown by 125% with Becton, Coppice, Crag, Heatherwood and North Ridge schools joining our family. I've personally been working close with the leaders of these new academies for a good while prior to conversion, but the transition from being an LA maintained school to becoming an academy does create changes, and managing these changes has been a major part of our work this year.

In October we had our first external review of the Trust, which reinforced the self assessment of the strengths and weaknesses we have, and has informed the changes to the central Trust team we've made for September.

It was fantastic to host our second Trust Conference on 24 February, with 5 of our academies attending. This no doubt feels like a long time ago for all of us, but it was a hugely successful day (karaoke notwithstanding) and feedback from delegates was so, so positive. In visiting our academies after the event, it was really funny to hear people talking about "mood hoovers" and "wearing our positive pants". I feel really strongly that we need to continue to value this investment in whole-workforce development and wellbeing, though we also need to be mindful of the current social distancing expectations and the risks of having over 850 staff in one venue next year.

We've had 3 Ofsted inspections this year - one at North Ridge; one at Pennine View; and a pre-opening inspection for our new academy, Bader. It was so heartening to hear the positives fed back by the HMIs involved in all 3 inspections, with the strength of Headteacher leadership evident in all our schools.

We had such a high response rate to our inaugural employee opinion survey and one consistent trend across all academies is the confidence all staff have in their senior leadership teams. This isn't a surprise, but it is affirming to get such clear positives back from staff. It was also great to hear that staff have a real appetite for cross-Trust working and collaboration, which is a key area of focus for us next year. Given the changes to the structure of the Trust this year, it's been sensible to wait until we've completed conversions before we start to co-construct our MAT-wide collaboration model, though this work has now started in earnest ahead of September.

Please turn over...

Learning together, to be the best we can be

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Throughout the entirety of the Coronavirus lockdown period, I have been staggered by the courage, resilience, and selflessness of the whole Nexus MAT community. In every academy, the needs of children and families have been at the heart of the decisions we've taken. We know that this has been a hugely worrying and stressful time for everyone, and yet almost everyone has done what has been asked of them with understanding and compassion.

As we moved toward the other side of the Brexit debate, it seemed impossible to imagine an issue that would be as polarizing in British society: and yet here we are.

Everybody has their own individual, deeply personal perspective on the Government's advice and response to this pandemic, and I'm sure nobody would claim this has been a faultless period of decision making. However, state school leaders have a legal responsibility to do what is asked of us by the Secretary of State for Education. Our continuing offer of provision throughout this period has been because that is what we were asked to do by the Government. Our plans for all children returning in September are in place for the same reason.

We can all see the huge differences between the expectations on schools compared to other sectors. There are times when such differences are really difficult to understand. However, we are required to follow the policy directives issued by Government and do all we can to make that work as safely and effectively as possible in our academies. I understand why not everybody will agree with that, but I firmly believe that across the Trust we've consistently tried to do the right thing for the right reasons. I also think it's important to say that, where other state schools haven't done the same, decision makers will be held to account for that. The Government have made that really clear.

Looking forward to the new academic year, I am so excited about the opening of Bader Academy, our new special school in Doncaster. Completion of the school building has been delayed due to the COVID-19 crisis, so we are opening for year 7 pupils in a temporary site (which we're calling 'The Bridge'), with all other pupils remaining on their current school roll, or dual rolled, until the school site is complete. This will be by January 2021 at the latest, though we will ensure all Bader pupils have a personalised transition plan and support from the new school team in the autumn term.

At the same time, we'll be moving forward with the completion of our second new special school - Discovery Academy in Sheffield - as we sprint toward a September 2021 opening.

Whilst I don't expect 2020-2021 to bring the growth that we experienced this year, I am expecting the Trust to continue to work with like minded schools and therefore we may continue to see further growth - and most certainly development - of our MAT over the next 12 months.

Thank you to everybody for all you've done this year. Governors, staff, volunteers: our combined efforts make the difference for the communities we serve. Please stay safe and have a truly wonderful summer break.

Warren Carratt

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