

CEO Briefing



It was the best possible (and also the most nerve wracking) start to spring term 2 for me, to be able to see all of our staff together at Magna for our Nexus MAT conference. When you live and breathe it every day, it's easy to miss how far we've come as a collective and how much our family of schools has grown. Seeing so many of us together was a powerful, visual reminder of how much we've developed since we last got together in 2020, yet also how consistent we still are with our vision and values. It was a genuine pleasure to talk to so many colleagues and personally welcome people back after the half term break. I'm also really grateful to our Chair of the Trust Board, Andy Child MBE, for taking the time to join us at Magna.

We will reflect on feedback from the conference this year as we consider how best to bring our growing family of schools together in the future, as we will struggle to find a venue (or venues!) which accommodate our needs. The cost of the conference was covered by income generated by the central Trust team, from their supporting other schools and academy trusts in the area, so I'm proud to say that we were able to deliver the conference at a genuine zero cost to our schools.

Monday 20 February was also a significant day as the BBC launched their documentary "SEND Help", which filmed at Hilltop School. I worked with the documentary team back in the autumn to help raise the profile of the capacity crisis in special educational needs. Not only does this directly impact on special schools, but it also impacts on mainstream schools where we have pupils who need specialist provision, but can't access it due to a lack of places.

Whilst we could have done without the slightly misleading BBC News headline of "educating children in a cupboard" (to be fair, it was a former stockroom that has been re-purposed into 1:1 space), I think the documentary itself really shines a light on a national issue that has so far been under-reported, and I hope it gives our politicians pause for thought about the extent of capital investment needed in the sector. As a MAT, we don't have £50m to rebuild our schools, so we - and other schools across the country - desperately need the Government to recognise the extent of the issue and prioritise investment. It is my sincere hope it's a case of when, not if, and that our courage in contributing to this documentary allows others to understand the space pressures that special schools manage daily, and the impact this has on the families we serve.

In my opening remarks at the conference, I wanted to use the opportunity to acknowledge the difficulties that strike action brings: for all of those involved with or affected by it.

There has never been a greater need for mutual respect - and disagreement that isn't disagreeable - in our society. In the coming weeks and months, there is a likelihood that industrial action across our sector will increase in frequency, but my sincere hope is that we maintain the same levels of respectful regard and compassion that we've shown one another, to date.

Warren
Warren Carratt

Spotlight on the Trust Team...

In this briefing, we're focusing on... one of our Executive Regional Directors, **Paula Williams**, and one of our Headteachers, **Michelle Sault**!

Paula is one of our Executive Regional Directors, joining Nexus MAT in September 2022 having previously been Assistant Director for Learning, Access and Inclusion in Derbyshire County Council.

Paula started her career as a primary teacher in a town centre multicultural mainstream school and became a school SENCo in her second year of teaching, cementing her interest and passion for the area of inclusion through completing the PGCE Diploma in SEN. Paula moved to specialist teaching in 1997 and gained two further PGCE certificates in the Teaching of Children with Specific Learning Difficulties and the Teaching of Children with Autism. During this time she gained extensive practical experience of teaching children and young people with additional needs which lead her into leadership positions as Head of Inclusion Support Services and eventual Head of Inclusion for Rotherham Council. She was part of the first cohort of leaders to gain the National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTi) award.

Paula moved to support Lincolnshire County Council in strengthening their graduated response to additional needs in mainstream schools and reviewing their hospital and home tuition provision before moving on to Derbyshire just prior to the COVID pandemic lockdown.



Michelle Sault is Co-Headteacher responsible for the West Riding Campus of Kenwood Academy, a new specialist provision in Barnsley which opened in September 2022. Michelle worked in Further Education for over 15 years before moving into special education needs by managing ten pupil referrals units based across Barnsley. Whilst managing the pupil referral units, Michelle founded an early intervention and

prevention mental health support team called MindSpace, supporting children aged 11 to 16 and their families across the ten Barnsley secondary schools. The success of the mental health support team led Michelle to a secondment in 2019 with the Department for Education to support the national roll out of their mental health support teams. Michelle's passion lies within special education needs and improving the social and emotional mental health of children and young people. Michelle's interests include daily exercise, reading, and she has recently started a Masters in the Social, Emotional, Mental Health of children and young people with SEBDA and Oxford Brookes university.

