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9 March 2023

[By email]

Dear all

Thank you for your letter, received by email on 8 March 2023. We felt a collective response from the Trust, as follows, would be the best way to reply to you all. We have also shared your letter and this reply with both the Trust Board and Members.

As a Trust we are fully committed to doing everything we can to ensure we give every child the opportunity to be the best they can be whilst providing them with excellence in education. A year ago, we worked on a set of values (our EPIC values which can be found [on our website](#)) that we felt all members of our community could aspire to and believe in, thus helping us to achieve our aims.

How we work as a family of schools

In line with our Trust's aims, there has been a change in some of the ways we work as a family of schools in order to provide greater support for all of our staff and children. Whilst we know some decisions have led to concern from some parents, we believe we have done our utmost to uphold our values and ensure a secure future for the Trust and its schools. Over the last few months, there have been many notable improvements across our schools, together with some excellent outcomes. These are attributable to the hard work and commitment of a huge number of skilled, professional colleagues who work within our wonderful schools, who hold our Trust values dear.

Across both the Trust Board, and central team, we share your concerns around the unknown impacts of the Covid pandemic on our children and we want to reassure you that we work with a number of expert bodies and advisors (for example, educational psychologists, wellbeing services, CAMHS, specialist teaching teams, SEN services and social care) to ensure we put the necessary measures into place to help support those who need it. Partly in response to these challenges we have invested in creating a dedicated Trust lead for SEND and Safeguarding and for Personal Development, who work closely together to ensure that the school experience for pupils, across the Trust, is the best it can be. All improvements we make, be they to the learning environments in our



schools, the curriculum or other strategic changes, are based on a wealth of experience and expertise on how to create the best opportunities for children to learn and teachers to teach, in order to ensure that pupils are able to achieve their full potential. We want our schools to provide congenial, welcoming settings where ALL children feel safe and happy and all our decisions have this in mind.

It is vital to us all that our schools retain their uniqueness and distinctiveness. The local communities our schools serve are unique and they all have differing opportunities and challenges. We empower our Headteachers and leadership teams as they lead our family of schools. They very much value this and they also know they now have - and can call upon - much more support and cross-Trust expertise. We recognise there are a wide range of views across our communities about multi-academy trusts, but across both the Board and Trust leadership we very strongly believe there are a significant range of tangible benefits of belonging to our multi academy trust such as training, central support and services, shared resources, curriculum expertise, SEND and safeguarding support. We want children in all our schools to have the same chances and opportunities regardless of which school they attend.

The decision to enhance some centralised activities and services is done so they can benefit all children and staff in our schools and does not mean any loss of uniqueness or distinctiveness of our schools. We regularly review the decisions we've taken to increase our central capacity to support schools, and our Headteachers see the provision of centralised services as very positive; enabling the schools to fully concentrate on their pupils and communities each and every day. Our central team's activities are led by our schools, Headteachers and their teams, and the needs of our children, schools and their communities. Trust Headteachers meet weekly to determine and agree priorities and the direction of school and trust improvement; our school improvement activities are very much in partnership with our schools, in line with one of our EPIC values: improvement through collaboration.

Feedback and consultation

We believe constructive feedback from across our communities is vital and we value discussion and feedback as it has the potential to make things even better for our children. All of our schools have mechanisms in place for gathering views of parents, pupils and staff. However, there are some issues which we are not able to discuss with the community, such as the recent support staff contract changes. This was a matter between the Trust and the individuals concerned and it is not appropriate to discuss such staffing matters publicly.

Staffing matters, changes and consultations are never matters for public consultation. We know that this has caused upset and disappointment for some of you who felt that you



wanted to be consulted on this matter. However, we ask that you do not let this give you the view that we do not want to listen to parents, carers, pupils and the community on other matters - indeed views from our communities, schools and governors have led directly to some of the decisions the Trust Board have taken, for example around investment in central provision for SEND, Personal Development, and Estates support.

It has been suggested that due to the changes, provision for pupils with SEND will be lessened and that the number of pupil support roles would be decreased. We would like to reassure you once again that the level of support for pupils with SEND has absolutely not been lessened and we are not proposing to decrease the number of teaching assistants in our schools. Where colleagues have left their employment, or obtained promoted posts, we want to assure you that we have had absolutely no problem in attracting very high quality applicants for these posts.

Millthorpe learning environment and behaviour

Your letter also refers to some specific changes to the learning environment and the behaviour policy at Millthorpe School. Firstly, we would like to clarify that such changes are not, as has been suggested, a 'MAT diktat'. We simply do not and will not work in this way. Decisions in this regard, like most other things, rest with our schools. Ms Greenhalgh, Headteacher, sent a detailed letter to parents/carers on 2 March 2023, which we hope clarifies the facts and the rationale behind the decisions and changes made by the school, but if there are still outstanding queries or concerns, Ms Greenhalgh is encouraging parents/carers to contact the school or indeed visit, so that they can see the reality of the changes to the learning environments. As mentioned earlier, all decisions are made with the benefit of the collective experience of our Headteachers and the central team and with the long-term interests of the pupils at heart. We are investing heavily in learning environments across the Trust and we would like parents/carers to have the opportunity to see the school in action.

With this in mind, Ms Greenhalgh and her team are organising an open evening event in the coming weeks for current and prospective parents, who wish to see the reality of the learning environment for themselves, find out more about the school and ask any questions that they may have. This will include the opportunity to speak with governors, pastoral staff, senior leaders and central trust staff. Further details will follow in due course.

Communication and engagement

We understand that a perceived lack of communication can be frustrating. We aim to communicate relevant, timely information to you, but we know we may not always get this 100% right, particularly as we all have different needs in terms of how much information we want or expect. We do not feel that public debates on social media will serve our communities and schools well, and we would always encourage anyone with queries or



concerns to contact your schools directly. Again, we encourage you to use the feedback mechanisms which are in place at our schools to share your thoughts on how we could do better in helping you to feel better informed.

We would like to reassure you again that our utmost priority is to deliver the best possible education for your children, and to keep them safe and happy. The children in our care are our priority. We know that not every decision will be popular with the whole community, but we make all our decisions and strategic changes based on the deep experience and knowledge in our schools and central team, so that we can continue to provide all that we can for the children in our schools and for our communities.

Finally, we would also like to take this opportunity to thank parents and carers for their support and the wealth of positive feedback we have received in recent weeks, in recognition of our hardworking staff, whose commitment makes a real difference to our children across the Trust every day.

We hope this gives some context and rationale for the changes and some reassurance about our commitment to our pupils, staff and communities; realised through our approach as a Trust which protects and encourages the uniqueness and distinctiveness of our schools.

Yours faithfully



Mark Hassack
Chief Executive



Ian Wiggins
Chair of Trustees

