



First Year Progress Report

Dear Parents,

The STAR Multi-Academy Trust celebrated its first birthday on 1 May 2019 and what a busy first year it has been!

Our focus in year one has been on developing the culture and infrastructure of our Trust, literally from scratch. This has proven challenging at times and we have learned many lessons. It has, however, been hugely rewarding as we gradually begin to realise the substantial opportunities that can be gained from working together.

We have always known that to ensure the success and sustainability of our Trust we needed to establish strong foundations which secure it as a viable business. In a challenging financial climate this will enable us to maximise the resources we have to provide an outstanding education for all our children. This has taken some time to achieve, but the Trust Board is very pleased with the progress that has been made and we can now enter our second year with great confidence and optimism.

Clare Thornton-Eckford
Chair of the Trust Board

Some of our challenges this year

- As maintained schools we were only accountable to North Yorkshire County Council. As a Trust, we are now a limited company and have statutory financial reporting responsibilities to the ESFA (Education and Skills Funding Agency), the DfE and are also scrutinised by external and internal auditors.
- Initially there was a significant period of turmoil around financial data input, accuracy and reporting. Data is critical for the effective strategic leadership of our Trust. The levels of compliance and accountability have increased significantly; as a consequence the need for accurate data has increased as well.
- Before conversion the majority of our contracts e.g cleaning, HR, Payroll were traded by individual schools with NYCC and the contract periods ran from April to March. Our schools converted from May onwards meaning that we were unable to exit any of these contracts until April 2019 (at the earliest). We were consequently unable to immediately benefit from any economies of size and scale, by negotiating new contracts, until the end of our first year.
- The 2018-2019 teachers' pay award was not fully funded (despite the government's assertion that it would be). This has presented a considerable and unexpected cost pressure on an already stretched budget and has required increased financial prudence in all our schools.
- Establishing central services which adequately serve the business needs of our Trust but are also cost effective and do not draw significant funds away from 'front-line' educational services
- Developing and implementing robust Trust wide policies and establishing consistently high quality local governance across all schools in the Trust
- Creating a 'culture of collaboration'. This is crucial if we are to achieve our aims for children, and will build collective capacity for improvement, beyond that which any of our schools could achieve alone (the 'MAT premium'). Strong, trusting relationships are crucial as is the need for all of us to compromise when necessary!

Some of our successes this year

- All necessary compliant systems, processes, controls and policies have now been established. We have successfully undergone 5 consecutive financial audits - including a visit from the ESFA
- Sufficient central services capacity has been established to enable us to run the Trust efficiently but also to support some of our smaller schools with financial processing. This will enable them to focus more time and resource directly on the needs of children.
- New cleaning, HR and payroll contracts have now been negotiated. We have achieved lower priced contracts with a cost saving of over £100k, whilst getting better service. Similarly, the cost of insurance premiums for our schools have been renegotiated resulting in a total saving of £92K

- As a Trust of over 3000 children, we automatically qualify for ‘School Conditions Allowance’ (SCA). The level of funding allocated for 2019-2020 has been confirmed as a huge £1.2 million. This money will be spent entirely on improving our ageing and deteriorating school buildings. As a comparison, in 2018-2019 devolved capital directly allocated from the LA to our schools amounted to a total of only £80K. This is a significant improvement to say the least!
- The Trust has received (following our successful bid) £107K of ‘MAT development funding’ which will be used for school improvement purposes and will also support some of our central services.
- We have been successful with a bid to the Primary Science Teaching Trust to form a local cluster. Each primary school will receive £2.5K and have access to a £5K resources pot over the next five years. This will really help to improve the quality of primary science teaching across the Trust.
- From September all our schools will be clerked by York Governance Services. This has already had a significant impact on the consistency and quality of governance across the Trust and assists in keeping communication between governing bodies and the Trust board running smoothly.
- **And last, but by no means least**, following a recent external review Saxton CE primary has received validation of its own self evaluation of being ‘good’ in all Ofsted areas. This is a huge achievement and reflects an enormous amount of hard work by our colleagues at the school over the last two years

Some of our plans for 2019-2020

- We will be prioritising contract negotiation in the following areas with a view to making further savings and service improvements
 - Catering
 - Energy and Energy Efficiency
 - Telecommunications
 - Printers, Copiers and Scanners
 - Paper and Admin Supplies
- SCA funding will be allocated across the Trust based on identified conditions priorities. That will undoubtedly mean (amongst other things) lots of roof repairs, new windows and new boilers in some of our schools!
- We will continue to develop the scope of our central services team to support our Headteachers and enable them to focus their time and energy on school improvement
- Our schools will begin operating common assessment and reporting processes.
- We will be launching Trust ‘curriculum principles’ which will guide collective 3-19 curriculum development activities and will be a further driver for collaboration across all schools in the Trust.