



26th May 2022

Dear Parents and Carers

It has been another busy term with plenty of challenges for schools. Year 6 pupils have taken SATs for the first time since 2019 and Year 11 and 13 have begun their examinations, again for the first time since the onset of COVID-19. Almost without exception, the SATs went well and secondary school examinations have begun positively as well. I am sure like me, you wish all children the very best of luck in any tests or exams they are taking this summer and I hope they all achieve what they need to, so that their next steps in education or into the world of work are positive ones.

We have also welcomed a number of Ukrainian children to our schools and of course, Ukrainian families to our communities. Some of the individual stories from these children are heart-wrenching and put into perspective our own challenges here in the UK. Many of the children have left their parents on the frontline, unsure when or if they will see them again. We have prepared advice to schools on how to support Ukrainian children when they arrive, which includes using the Ukrainian language for school signs and asking children to learn to say 'hello' in Ukrainian. There are a number of other structural alterations we are making in school to help these new children learn our language quickly and feel part of our school communities. Please could I ask that you speak with your children at home and ask them as we have in our schools, to make the Ukrainian children feel welcomed and supported.

It will not have escaped your attention that the cost of living is marching upwards with everything from fuel to pasta costing more week on week. Energy costs in particular have hit Trust schools hard and we know that for the coming 18 months we will see energy costs in schools rise significantly. In fact, last week I signed contracts in excess of £2 million for gas and electric. As such, this cost is now becoming quite a significant one across our schools and I have asked all Headteachers to look at ways of reducing their use of energy. Of course, it is good to use less energy simply to reduce our carbon footprint, but going forward the price of energy is making this cost centre a significant one. I estimate we will spend in the region of £5 million in the next academic year on energy - money that could be spent on school resources for teaching and learning.

One of the more positive pieces of work we have been engaged in as an organisation is the development of a Race Charter in partnership with BANES Local Authority and other agencies. I am delighted to report that we have signed up to this charter which focusses on ensuring children in our care and the communities within which we live, are tolerant of different races. To be clear, the Trust stance on racism is that it is abhorrent and has no place in our society. Like all forms of prejudice, racism undermines all that is positive in our lives and I hope parents and carers will agree that we must ensure prejudice is stamped out. To that end, I have instructed Headteachers to ensure that they re-emphasise the curriculum work already in place to teach children about what constitutes prejudicial behaviour and specifically racism. I have also asked them to use the full range of the disciplinary powers available to them to sanction children that exhibit prejudicial behaviour, or make inappropriate comments.

In other positive news, St John's Primary School in Midsomer Norton received a church school inspection (SIAMS) last week and whilst I cannot tell you the outcome at this point, we were all delighted by the result. These inspections are increasingly similar to those conducted by OFSTED and are an excellent indicator of how well a school supports children with their personal development in particular. Well done to the children and staff on such a positive outcome.





Finally, the Government released its long awaited whitepaper entitled: '[Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child.](#)' This outlines the key targets for further improvement in our education system over

the coming months and years. The following areas are set to become milestones for the Government and schools to focus on:

- 1) 90% of children in primary schools should achieve Age Related Expectation in reading, writing and maths by 2030. The current national figure is 65% (2019). The Trust schools achieved 69% last time SATs were taken in 2019.
- 2) The national average GCSE grade for maths and English to be a grade 5 by 2030. The current national is between a grade 4 and 5. The Trust is just below a grade 5 overall.
- 3) There is a renewed determination to support the most disadvantaged children and those with a special educational need to ensure they can catch up in their learning.
- 4) There will be 500,000 additional training opportunities for new teachers by 2024.
- 5) There will be a special literacy qualification for certain teachers to undertake to support the development of reading and writing.
- 6) A new Early Years qualification will be available for leaders in primary schools to ensure children are supported in their learning in Nurseries and Reception Classes.
- 7) A new focus on empowering schools to be robust with poor behaviour and low attendance.
- 8) A longer working week for schools that do not have at least 32.5 hours of 'in-school time' each week. Almost all of our schools exceed this already and any changes must be in place by 2027.
- 9) A fully led Multi-Academy Trust system working in partnership with Local Authorities.
- 10) Better curriculum support for schools from centralised bodies to reduce workload of colleagues who write resources.

I am delighted to report that the targets contained in this Government paper match those we have across all our Trust schools. Therefore, this paper is focussed on the right things that will make a difference to the outcomes for children. Our challenge of course, is recruiting enough good teachers and leaders and resolving some of the tougher behaviour and attendance issues we sometimes see. Parents can help with the latter of these two points by reminding children about why they should behave and respect adults and ensuring their children meet the requirements of the law and attend school.

Since rates of COVID-19 have fallen and more people have been protected through vaccination, we have seen a steady rise in attendance figures. However, the rise of attendance in the South West is happening at a slower rate than in the rest of England and Wales. So please do encourage your children to be at school every day unless they really are very unwell.

I wish you a restful half term break and I hope to hear some stories of Platinum Jubilee celebrations from children when I visit schools in June.

Kind regards

Alun Williams
CEO

