

Pennine Academies Yorkshire

Summer Newsletter

2020



Message from Chief Executive – Michael Thorp



Dear Pennine Staff,

It is coming up to one year since I was appointed as Chief Executive Headteacher of the Pennine Academies Yorkshire. I remember clearly at interview being asked what challenges I envisaged during my first twelve months in post. I don't remember my exact answer but I am pretty sure it bears no resemblance to the events we have had to move through in the past year.

Strength comes through adversity, and as we have had adversity by the bucket load of recent – so it makes sense that we have also had strength. I wanted to put together this end of year newsletter to give you a flavour of that strength, and that even though these have been strange and challenging times, the Trust has grown from strength to strength and kept the momentum going.

Of course the latest challenge has been to expand the school offer to further year groups. This has taken an enormous amount of planning, risk assessing and re-arranging of our environment and routines. More than that, it has required a change in mind set from us all to grit our teeth begin the small steps back to our core business. I have no doubt we will get there, but it may take time.

In normal circumstances I would have gathered photographs and comments from children and staff for this newsletter. Clearly this has not been possible but I did want to capture for you all some of our amazing successes this year, so we do not forget how far we have come.

There is of course one enormous success, and a largely hidden one. That is the efforts you have all gone to, to keep children and families safe, fed, look after and nurtured. For that, the Trustees and Executive Team cannot thank you enough.

Michael

Message from the Chair of Trust Board – Nick Briggs



When I was appointed as Chair of Trustees of Pennine Academies Yorkshire in December of last year, I had three aims: increase the visibility of Trust Board members to Trust staff, ensure the Trust Board worked efficiently in discharging its accountabilities and, on a personal level, work closely with Michael, our Chief Executive, to move through the financial challenges that the Trust faced at that time. As it has happened, and as Michael has described in this newsletter, the Trust has met its immediate financial challenges. Ultimately, these financial challenges have been superseded by a new challenge: the COVID-19 pandemic.

Circumstances for us all have changed, and my personal aims on joining the Trust have had to change too. My aim of holding Trust Board meetings at our schools to improve the visibility of our Trustees has been replaced with an effective use of video conferencing technology so that our Trustees can continue to meet. This utilisation of technology and of good board practice has meant that our Trustee meetings continue to be well run so that the wide experience and skills of our Trustees are utilised to ensure that there is an effective governance of our Trust. Looking to the future, the skills of our Trustees will be carefully mapped against the operation of the Trusts' quality assurance processes. The result will be increased Trustee accountability and discharge of responsibilities. At some point, and when it is safe to do so, we will hold Trust Board meetings at our schools for those that can attend and will use video technology for those that cannot.

In terms of my own personal aim, I have tried to be available to Michael at all times so that I can be a sounding board for discussion and support to him as he shapes with our leaders the way forward through this pandemic. In this respect, and whilst we focus on the day to day challenges of providing quality education to our children, it is heart-warming to know that there are now significant areas of strength in the Trust. For example: our improved financial performance, the development of a skilled central team, the expansion of the Trust through the consultation about Grove House, our developing presence in the District because of the professionalism of our SEND offer, and the overall governance of the Trust.

In closing, strategy is often seen as the delivery of a grand vision and a grand plan. However, sometimes it is actually a collection of thoughtful, careful decisions made at the right time which in retrospect can be seen as a secure way forward through a difficult time. For now, it seems to me that we are all playing our part in different ways to support the education of our children. Thank you for all that you are doing.

Nick

Area of Success –

Expansion

On March 12 we were pleased to be informed that Grove House Primary School had been given the green light by the Regional School's Commissioners Office to convert to Academy Status joining Pennine Academies Yorkshire. We are now undertaking a 'Virtual Consultation'. Again this is a very novel experience all being done via Google Meet. We are consulting as widely as possible with community stakeholders, parents, staff and children. The consultation is expected to end on July 4th and if that is successful, for Grove House to join us on November 1st. I am pleased to tell you that Lynette Clapham, who was Head of School has now been appointed Headteacher. I have now stepped aside from my role in that school.

Grove House was inspected in November 2013 and judged to be Requiring Improvement. Through the fantastic leadership of Nick Briggs (Chair of Governors at the time) and Lynette the school has made significant progress and we are firmly of the belief it will be judged Good at next inspection. Nick of course has continued his journey to now become the Chair of Pennine Academies Yorkshire.

Area of Success –

Financial Strength

Centralising the finances of the schools has been revolutionary. We now have extremely tight financial controls in place and can be confident that we are achieving value for money. For a variety of reasons at conversion the Trust had a considerable deficit. By the August 2019 this was £300,000 in the red. We have been under enormous pressure from the Department for Education to solve the problem. It formed the largest barrier to expansion. Through the hard work of Lisa and her team and the headteachers we are now back in to surplus having saved over £400,000 during the course of the year. This means we can now aim to build reserves. These reserves are there to help us overcome future barriers we may face (like boilers blowing up) or future building projects at the schools. The local authority is now no longer there to bail us out so we must be financially independent. To strengthen our position further we have applied for over £800,000 of external funding and look forward to some success in this area.

Area of Success –

The Central Team

Last July there were no central trust staff. In 12 months things have changed significantly. I was appointed at the end of July and was fortunate enough to appoint Lisa Bradley as Chief Financial Officer. Subsequently we were joined by two new Business Partners – David Summerscales and Jenni Taylor. The business partners have centralised a number of functions including HR, Finance, Estates Management, Health and Safety and Compliance. This allows schools to focus on their core business – improving outcomes for children.

We have also been joined at central by Kerry Mulroy – ICT & Network Manager. I am reflective that we appointed her in the nick of time as having a coherent approach to ICT has been imperative during COVID times. Kerry is an experienced ICT professional who will be working to pull together ICT systems so they are aligned across the schools and so that we all have the ICT resources we need. It is clear this is a huge area of focus for the future.

Lastly Kate Evans has joined the central team as a trainee financial accountant. She is currently being trained and will be producing monthly management accounts for each school and completing VAT returns etc.

And luckily, thanks to Hollingwood we now have a home! We reside in the extension above the community room. If the team continues to expand we will need to find a new home.



Lisa Bradley - CFO

Area of Success –

SEND



By the time Grove House joins us in November, beyond our current mainstream SEND offer across the Trust, we will also be offering 57 enhanced resource provision places for pupils with a greater degree of need. This includes 24 places for pupils with Communication and Interaction difficulties (Crossley Hall). The council refurbished the Children Centre, now named The Vines, at the cost of £130,000.



We have 20 places for pupils with Social, Emotional and Mental Health issues (Hollingwood) and will have 13 places for pupils with Visual Impairment (Grove House). We deliver all these places for the Local Authority and we are rapidly building our reputation and expertise in this area. It is central to Trust development that we become a centre of excellence for mainstream and mainstream plus SEND education. The next area of development for the central team will be to centralise SEND to achieve consistent and quality support across the trust. We are aiming for all schools to achieve the Inclusion Quality Mark this coming year.

Area of Success –

Collaborative Working

A key group we have developed this year is the Headteacher's Executive Group (HEG). This group normally meets once a month, but for obvious reasons has been meeting twice a week of late. The group is chaired by Jonathan Duke (Deputy CEH) and is an opportunity to discuss current issues in school, make collective decisions about strategy and to plan collaborative work. This led to Headteachers being comfortable in taking part in each other's B11 Education reviews earlier this year. We will be looking for many more of the opportunities for wider groups during the course of this year.



Area of Success –

Governance

Good governance is the cornerstone of an effective Trust and we have undertaken much work in this area this year. We have a new Chair of Trust in Nick Briggs. I am pleased to say we now have 10 trustees, meetings are always quorate, and the quality and quantity of skills we have from our Trustees is phenomenal. They have been incredibly supportive during this latest crisis and we have met on a regular basis to undertake Trust business and respond to the situation. I am particularly pleased to welcome Scott Crosby; from Public Health England who I am sure you can imagine has been a vital addition to the board at this time. We do still have 2 vacancies which we will be seeking to fill during the course of the year.

We have also sourced and appointed 5 Members (they appoint the Trustees).



Focus on Trustees – Scott Crosby

Scott currently works as the Health and Wellbeing Programme Manager at Public Health England (PHE) and Programme Director for Prevention at North Lincolnshire and Goole NHS Foundation Trust.

After graduating from Brunel University in 1996 Scott worked in Business and Marketing before moving in to Education and then Public Health, where he has worked since 2003 for the NHS, the Department of Health and a Local Authority.

A recognised expert in Tobacco Control, with over 20 years of leading multiple programmes across the health and educational systems to improve health. Scott is a visiting Lecturer of Public Health at the School of Medicine at the University of Leeds. He is a Fellow at the Royal Society of Public Health (RSPH) and was elected as a Fellow of the Faculty of Public Health (FPH) through Distinction for his contribution to Public Health in 2016

Skill set: leadership, political awareness, advocacy, strategic vision, creativity and problem solving

