



Message from Catherine Brooker, CEO

I am thrilled that Northallerton School is now part of our family of schools. I know that there have been a turbulent few years but I firmly believe this new partnership is the start of a more positive era for you and your children.

To that end, we have the exciting news to share that we have secured almost £9 million from the Department for Education, after a rigorous bidding process that only concluded 2 weeks ago. After commissioning surveys for all three school sites and considering future growth needs, we put forward three proposals and were awarded the biggest sum by the DfE. As a result, work will begin soon to completely redevelop and refurbish the current accommodation on the former Allertonshire sites and to create new buildings. There is more information about the project in the Q&A supplement of this letter, but we are confident this is the most beneficial use of this hard-won funding.

We have also put plans in place to establish a strong and stable leadership team to ensure the trust's Rapid Improvement Plan for the school is implemented. As you will have seen in Jan Linsley's message, following Mr Drew's resignation we have appointed Mrs Rahn as Head of School to ensure stability and continuity. The results this summer testify to her and her team's effective leadership. To support Mrs Rahn, we have also appointed a very experienced new Deputy Head, Andrew Wilkinson, who was deputy head at Wensleydale school where he played a huge part in leading the school's improvement.

The trust has appointed a new local governing body which I am pleased to say includes members of the previous Interim Executive Body, including Jan Linsley, a National Leader of Governance, who has agreed to chair the newly formed local governing body. We shall also be recruiting two parent governors to join the team – more information about that to follow.

Getting to this point has been complex and challenging but our belief in Northallerton as a school and community means we are confident we can realise the enormous potential of your children, whose future is at the heart everything we do.

Our name Areté is based on the most articulated value in ancient Greek culture and put simply means pursuing excellence. It embraces wider ideals, including moral values, effort, high aspiration - becoming the best we can be. With your help, these are the values which we hope to rebuild at Northallerton School.

It has been great to get to know quite a number of Northallerton parents during the past year and I am looking forward to working with all of you to support your children's learning and ensure that we can all be proud of being part of Northallerton School. I must emphasise: the trust, the staff, students and, crucially, parents all have a part to play in realising that vision.

You'd be very welcome to come along to a parents' meeting on 3rd October so that we can give you more information about the new plans for the school site, what it means to be a sponsored academy within our trust, and how you can contribute to our rapid improvement plans. I shall look forward to meeting you.

Questions and our answers:

When and why did Mr Drew resign?

Mr Drew resigned during the summer term after a long period of absence while he was still a Local Authority employee. We can't tell you any more than this as he was not working for the trust when he left.

Why have you not appointed a replacement Principal?

The school has been through a prolonged period of change and turbulence and needs stability. Mrs Rahn did an excellent job during the months when Mr Drew was absent, evidenced in the sustained improvements in many areas. We have appointed her to the post of Head of School. The trust is now responsible for the quality of education and the running of the school and will provide additional support and challenge to her and to the new Deputy Head, Mr Wilkinson. The trust has to ensure the school does make the necessary improvement - the CEO and other central staff will be working closely with Mrs Rahn, Mr Wilkinson and the Chair of the local governing body.

Who decided on the move to the Allertonshire site?

When the trust was asked to sponsor the school, a major concern for us was the state of the buildings and accommodation – for the students and the staff. We knew that the school in its present state would be too big a liability for us to take on. We commissioned surveys of all three sites and came up with three alternatives, all of them fully costed. We worked on a detailed bid which went through a long process of consideration by the Department for Education. The final decision rested with the Minister, Lord Agnew, who approved the funding of almost nine million pounds, to enable us to renovate the current Allertonshire buildings and to provide new classrooms.

What will the new school be like?

The architect and project manager we've appointed are drawing up plans now! We'll keep you informed with regular updates but the work includes a complete refurbishment of the current buildings, extending the gym and dining areas, new specialist rooms for subjects like Science and DT, a covered bridge and new classroom blocks.

When will the building work be completed?

The work will start very soon and will be completed within two years.

Will both Allertonshire sites be upgraded?

Yes.

This means a lot of time will be wasted on walking from site to site, won't it?

The distance between the two buildings is actually no more than walking from one end of the current site to the other. We will be planning how the accommodation will be scheduled to maximise learning. We have a unique opportunity to make sure that we plan the curriculum and timetable as efficiently as possible, including limiting movement, as we can start with a blank canvas.

Will the students be able to use the leisure centre and the all weather pitches?

Yes – we've had the full support of the Director of Leisure and Communities at the District Council.

Will this be a distraction from the school improvement work?

No – we won't allow that. We are in a unique position and have agreed with the Local Authority that the school will continue to operate on our current site until the work is completed when we'll move the school to its new accommodation. If we'd had to go with the option of trying to improve the current accommodation, there would have been huge disruption to learning – temporary classrooms, noise pollution, further limits to recreation space etc.

Why did we move to the current site only to move back?

The decision to move the younger students was taken by the previous board of governors after the two former schools were amalgamated. It was clear there were some problems to be addressed but these remain unresolved. Our professional surveys were rigorous in reviewing all the sites and making the recommendation that the best course of action is to invest in the improvements we have put to the Minister and for which he has granted the funding.

Does the trust have governors for its schools?

Yes - the Board of Directors is the legal entity but we choose to have local governing bodies as committees. The Interim Executive Board which was appointed by the local authority is no longer in place but quite a number of the members have agreed to become LGB members. Jan Linsley, who has extensive experience of working with Special Measures schools, has agreed to chair the LGB.

Will there be parents on the LGB?

Yes – the trust is committed to having parental representation on the LGBs. We'll be recruiting two parent governors very soon.

Will the uniform change?

There are no plans to change the uniform in the short term. We do delegate decisions about uniform to our LGBs but require them to consult parents before any change is made. Our FD also keeps value for money under regular view.

Will the trust change the name of the school?

No.

Do the plans include improvements for the sixth form?

Yes – the current facilities for the sixth form area are limited and this is an area of the school we plan to develop.

What plans does the Trust have for the Sixth Form provision?

Cuts in funding for post 16 education are affecting all colleges and schools. We value our sixth forms and are looking at ways of making our offer more cost-effective. This is a priority for all three ALT schools.

Is an academy like a business?

Only in the sense that we work hard to be efficient and to get best value for money so we can better resource the core work of teaching and learning. In the commercial world, a business makes profit for its shareholders. An academy trust is a charitable trust which cannot make profit.

As our school is currently in Special Measures - will we get another inspection soon?

Maintained schools that become sponsor-led academies become, in effect, new schools. An inspection will normally take place within three years. The principle is to give the trust time to drive sustainable improvement. However, Ofsted may conduct an inspection of any new school at any time, including within three years of opening, where information they receive causes sufficient concern. We'll be on alert from the start.

Is the school fully staffed for September?

Yes.

Will the timings of the school day change?

There are no plans to change the timing of the school day.

Will there be any changes to school holidays for the forthcoming academic year?

No.

This will be further for my child to walk to school – have you thought about this?

Yes - for some children, this might well be a slightly longer walk – for others it will be shorter. When there was a middle and an upper school in the town before the amalgamation, children walked to the school. Children who come from the large new housing estate close by will have a shorter and safer journey.

Will my child's school transport arrangements be affected when the school becomes an academy?

No - the Local Authority still has responsibility for school transport.

How can parents help?

We are already working with a number of parents who have offered their time and professional skills generously and we would value more input. If you have a skill that you think could help the school, then please get in touch via the email below.

However, the most important way in which parents can help is by ensuring you give full support to the staff, who often have to spend time on issues which impede learning. A report from Ofsted has shown that on average, UK pupils lose an hour a day in learning while teachers deal with low level disruption: things like pupils using mobile phones, swinging on chairs, chatting, play fighting and wearing the wrong uniform. We rely on parents to encourage their children to behave in the right way when they are in school, so teachers can focus on education. That means following the school's rules and codes of conduct, making sure your child brings the right equipment, is properly dressed in full uniform and does the homework set. We'll be sending home some reminders about expectations in the next few weeks.

If your question isn't answered here, please email northallertonqueries@aretelearningtrust.org

We'll reply directly or post your question(s) and our response on the school's website, if others have asked a similar question.