

From the CEO Newsletter



Dear Parents, Carers and Friends of Sussex Learning Trust,

I write this at the start of the Summer Term hoping you had a restful Easter and looking forward with optimism to a great Summer!

I want to update you on some developments across the Trust, which at present, encompasses Warden Park Primary Academy (WPPA), Northlands Wood Primary Academy (NWPA) and Warden Park Secondary Academy (WPSA). In 2021 we expect to open a new Primary Academy, Hurst Farm Primary Academy (HPPA - see below) and we anticipate further growth as other schools see the benefit of close collaborative working with like-minded professionals located in the same region. I will

write to headlines and in no particular order, but I hope I can give you a flavour of our current projects and foci for this time of the year and the Trust's development. In addition, we wish to be transparent in all we do to enhance our provision on behalf of your children and generations to come.



Helping Other Schools and Academies

Our Trust, your Trust, is led by myself as CEO and Jonathan Ash Edwards as Chair. The fact we are both 'Jonathans' is pure co-incidence, but we also share Government authority to lead on helping any schools and Governing bodies that require our assistance! I am a National Leader of Education (NLE) and Jonathan Ash Edwards is a National Leader of Governance (NLG). Because I was established as an NLE whilst Headteacher, Warden Park Secondary Academy is a National Support School which means I can commission our outstanding staff to assist in subject specific projects in schools requiring support. As an NLG, Jonathan Ash Edwards has been awarded a national Department for Education contract to lead Governance training which has led to his influencing literally hundreds of school Governing bodies. At the last count I am involved in, or have been, with supporting over 19 other schools. The Government covers the cost for my time away from SLT business, which goes directly back into the Trust budget to be spent on improving our Trust and academies. If I commission colleagues from

our academies to go and help elsewhere their fees come straight back into their academy budget. Therefore, you can see there is moral purpose in helping other schools, merely 'because it's the right thing to do', but also it brings needed funds into our budgets for our own children's benefit.



Northlands Wood Primary Academy



It is almost two years since NWPA joined the Trust, how time has flown! There is no doubt that the academy is 'flying' under the guidance of Mr Sears and his team, with the feedback from parents on their views of NWPA being phenomenally positive. In addition, last year saw a 25% rise in combined KS2 SATs results. There are more clubs, more activities, more opportunities and more pupils, than ever before! Forest Schools has been an excellent addition to the curriculum. Not surprisingly, the academy is over-subscribed for 2019. Mr Sears is supporting two schools in County with improving standards in Mathematics and English, both of which have really appreciated his input and report rapid improvements accordingly.

Another valuable addition to Northlands Wood is the recently opened sensory room. 'The Nest' is a community funded space which provides a safe space for children to reside during times of anxiety or when they need a sensory break. This was a particularly exciting venture for the new SENCo, Mrs Dann, to develop alongside her team and was one element which led to NWPA gaining the Silver Autism Awareness Award. The academy welcomes visits to explore the work which it has been doing linked to this and to discuss future plans.

Warden Park Primary Academy



Very recently, Mr Davis was able to report to me that not only was his academy over-subscribed for the second year running but for 2019 we were massively oversubscribed with first choice applicants! To be honest, I wasn't surprised. Earlier this year, I attended the Open Mornings with many prospective parents considering their options for their children. The response to the tours were wholly positive. The calm, purposeful atmosphere, the improvements to the building and the obvious enthusiasm of the teachers and all staff were three areas that were highlighted. In January 2018 we opened our new Nursery. Some professionals cautioned us that 'we would struggle to make the facility work financially' but they underestimated the quality of provision and therefore, the numbers of parents seeking places! Our Nursery is led by an exceptional, qualified, teacher with

excellent support from a very experienced support team. As a parent you 'know' when you will be happy to send your child somewhere! Our only disappointment is when we have to turn people away because we are full! However, there is always movement, so if you have been disappointed in the past make sure you are still on the waiting list or get yourself on it if you have a little one needing an excellent start to school.

Mr Davis is supporting two schools in adding capacity to their Leadership. We will be very sorry to see Mrs Walling leave us after amazing service to WPSA and WPPA most recently as Deputy Head. We will miss her wisdom, determination and commitment. Thank goodness, then, Mrs Brodie has returned from maternity leave fulltime as Deputy Head!

NWPA and WPPA Working Together

Mr Davis and Mr Sears are great Headteachers and when they work together they create a formidable team! They are establishing an SLT Primary Way in which we combine all the most successful strategies from each academy and create a blueprint for what we know works best for children. Increasingly, the academies are using the same software for teaching and assessment and this allows even more in-depth working together. Staff meetings are regularly shared which adds to the capacity and means that each year group of teachers has twice the number of colleagues they would normally have to share ideas etc.

Warden Park Secondary Academy



One piece of enormous news for WPSA is that we have successfully bid for £1.7million refurbishment of our 11 Science laboratories! The work will be commissioned this calendar year. As such, we will have to bear the 'pain' of closed rooms, corridors and staircases but we can be excited that the outcome of our renovated facilities will be well worth it!

Year 11 are close to the GCSE exams and every indication leads us to believe 2019 will be another very successful year.

Earlier this year I consulted on revising the admissions over-subscription criteria for year 7 places. The engagement with this consultation was huge. We listened to the overwhelming viewpoint that families were worried that local people, i.e. in-catchment, might not gain a place at their first choice school. Therefore, we decided 'no-change' for 2020 and a re-assessment that could successfully meet with everyone's approval should, I hope, give people confidence that when we say we will listen, we will! What was clear from the consultation was that we continue to have massive support from local people, for which we are very grateful for.

It has been another stellar year for our sports teams with our U12 boys football team winning 14 games in a row narrowly losing the District Final. There have been similar successes for our U13 and U15 teams. Our U12 girls football team are in the County Cup final and reached the last 16 of the Nationals. Our U13's won the Sussex Futsal Final and reached the last 16 of the Nationals too! In Rugby our U13's, U14's and U15 teams have enjoyed unbelievable success with special mention to our U16's who have won the District Final for the 5th time in 5 years. We have had success in other sports too including our girls table tennis team crowned Sussex Champions along with squash and golf success.

And finally, we have recently received further recognition for our work in 'Engaging with evidence and research' and our work in this area has been awarded 'Transforming' status by the SSAT. This recognises our practice as being amongst the most exceptional nationally. All of our work with evidence and research that we are engaging with is being used to continually improve the quality of teaching in the academy.

Hurst Farm Primary Academy



It's been a couple of years now since the Regional Schools Commissioner (the representative for the Secretary of State for Education) asked the Trust to open a new Primary school in Haywards Heath to meet new housing demand across the town and, therefore, pressure on school places. We have established a 'Steering Committee' from local people with a breadth of expertise and interest, especially prospective parents of children who may well seek the first places! We have a curriculum design ready to be implemented which has Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths (often referred to as STEM) and you can see this reflected in the academy

logo and badge with a DNA helix merging into a leaf and surrounded by the 'cogs' of technology. We have also appointed Mr Davis as Executive Headteacher who will continue to lead WPPA also. At present the planning and consultation process over the site identified for the academy is on-going and is obviously closely aligned to the proposed Country Park, Allotments and Cemetery which are also part of the scheme. From a period of seemingly little activity, we expect more information on our progress will begin to come 'thick and fast' in the coming months. For further information, please email astoneley@sussexlearningtrust.co.uk.

Leadership Development

If you have children at one of our academies, you will know we have great leaders as Headteachers and Senior Teams. Last term and this, we have established a training programme for our existing staff who have aspirations for promotion into roles with enhanced responsibility. In the main we hope this will prepare colleagues for internal promotion as we grow, but as a Trust we believe in encouraging colleagues to develop their careers in any institution because we want to impact wherever possible educational provision in the immediate area. The sessions are led by me and the Headteachers across the Trust and, as ever, we are encouraging 'cross-phase' (i.e. primary and secondary) colleagues to learn from each other and their specific age specialisms that each person brings. So far we have 100% positive feedback from colleagues who have attended these sessions!



Haywards Heath College

Just a word on the intended re-opening of the Sixth Form College. We have had very positive meetings with the Chichester College Group who are charged with re-establishing the College. The leaders are definitely people we can trust in to deliver the great facility our

young people deserve. Chichester are open to our suggestions and keen to work in partnership with us to make sure the College is 'right' for the students of Mid-Sussex. I believe they are still hoping to open in 2020, which sounds ambitious but the sooner the better!

Burgess Hill Expansion

As local residents we are all aware that some 3000 + homes are to be built in the designated 'Northern Arc' area. Because 'Homes England' has assumed control over the building programme it is anticipated that these houses will be built at a rate that other local developments have not proceeded with. In the plan there is an identified need for a new secondary academy and two new primary academies (shown in pink). These will meet the need for places for families in the new development plus the anticipated shortfall for places generally within the town. Trusts who wish to be considered to run one or more of these new schools will need to prepare a vision and a detailed plan for what the features of the new institutions would have, were they successful in being commissioned to open them. At present it is not clear who will co-ordinate the process of 'bidding' but it is quite likely that West Sussex will make recommendations to the Secretary of State as to who their preferred provider would be. As a Trust we intend to ask to be considered as a provider on the basis that we are currently proving the enormous value there is in close-knit collaboration between neighbouring and local schools to drive up standards and opportunities for the children. Ideally, we believe in 'all-through' provision, i.e. from Nursery to 16 years+. In order to support the re-establishment of the Haywards Heath College, and as outlined our confidence above, we do not intend to 'compete' by trying to establish a Sixth Form too. We anticipate very close working with the College to ensure provision from Nursery to 18 years is seamless.

When we consulted on wanting to maximise the 'all-through' provision across the Trust, the consultation papers included the benefits of aged 2-16 years' seamless

education so I won't repeat those here. However, there is a probable question that comes to mind:

Why would we want to run another secondary school in close proximity to WPSA?

'whatever we do has to be good enough for our own children'

Simply, because we believe that unfettered collaborative working between schools delivers better outcomes for children and young people. The alternative mechanism to get the highest possible outcomes for learners is through 'competition', i.e. the theory being that 'rival' schools encourage each other towards being better. Such a 'free-market' will have its supporters and distractors but we hold a position that we don't need to fell in competition to do the very best we can for our children. We do our very best because we apply the principle that 'whatever we do would have to be good enough for our own children'. If that isn't motivation enough, then we have a problem!

So, how would such collaboration be good for the students?' What would be the benefits or opportunities?

- Shared staff training to enhance the practice of each teacher and support personnel.
- The ability to offer wider professional opportunities for staff across two academies will be a recruitment and retention attraction so important with the current shortage of teachers.
- Increased efficiencies leading to savings ploughed back into teaching & learning.

- Wider extra-curricular opportunities, i.e. at either & each location.
- More leaders = even stronger leadership.
- Shared expertise for SEND deploying specific expertise to individual, and groups, of children.
- Shared campus facilities, i.e. 3G pitch, Performing Arts, Forest Schools, etc.
- Shared amenities, i.e. mini-buses, IT infrastructure. All savings which can go back to the children.
- More chance of getting an SLT place (see massive oversubscription for WPSA) for parents.
- A very similar ethos, but with subtle but important differences, will add to the local choice of parents.
- All staff would be local people working for local children, i.e. not coming from another, more distant Trust.

This list is not exhaustive, but I think illustrative of how it could be a great thing to have two secondary schools working closely alongside each other. Of course, if we were allowed to make the school 'all-through' all those benefits shared earlier in the year come into play too. I will keep you informed on the progress towards all of this, but meanwhile, if you would like to express an opinion, positive or negative or have a question to raise on our plans regarding bidding to run the new schools in Burgess Hill please do so via jmorris@sussexlearningtrust.co.uk.



Trust Finances

As an Academy Trust we essentially report one set of budget figures to the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) each year to cover all Trust activities, i.e. 3 academies plus central office. Having said that, each academy Headteacher and Governing Body administer

their 'share' in the format of their own budget, supported by Trust Officers where required. Despite the well-documented challenges to funding in West Sussex Schools we are managing to present balanced accounts in part due to prudent financial control, over-subscription

of pupil places and consultancy income as described elsewhere in this update. Whilst we are pleased with this performance, particularly in light of improved outcomes from each academy, we certainly recognise the strictures that current funding places on curriculum design (including KS4 courses, class sizes) and student services around their well-being and emotional support. Likewise, support for students with SEND has no slack at

all, which given the fluctuation, often increasing, needs of our students can leave us a little exposed! In addition, it is getting harder to recruit subject specific teachers especially in English, Maths and Science particularly as our academies are located in expensive areas to live. In short, we are performing well in resource management and value for money terms but there is certainly no room for complacency!

New Sussex Learning Trust Website



Our new web site is almost complete with a parts of it still under-construction but please feel free to visit us on www.sussexlearningtrust.co.uk. Your main website for information relevant to you is still your specific academy website.

A message to all our pupils and students

This caught my eye and we have adopted it as our own, 15 habits of 'lucky' people

1

work harder

2

complain less

3

teach others

4

show gratitude

5

share credit

6

choose kindness

7

volunteer first

8

unselfishly give

9

trust first

10

good manners

11

stay teachable

12

promote others

13

love to explore

14

storytellers

15

love to compete

"The harder I try, the luckier I get!"



I hope the above has been of interest. Thank you for your support in all we do on behalf of your children and those that reside in mid-Sussex.

Jonathan Morris, CEO Sussex Learning Trust