

News from the Governors

Welcome to a new term and the start of a new year at Dale Hall. I hope everyone is starting to feel at home in their new school, with their new teacher or new classroom. We had new members of staff joining at the beginning of the year and lots of new children and parents joining us. We are delighted to welcome you to our school.

I would also like to say a big thank you and goodbye to Trish Clarke and Ivy Scott as they leave the governing body following several years of service. We really appreciate all the time and support you have given.

This term we welcome George Abery-Bone on to the governing body and wish him good luck as he settles into his role. Also, welcome to Light Onyekachi who joined recently.

Academisation

Mrs Dedicoat and I have reviewed a variety of academies in the Suffolk area and agree that Penrose Trust is the best academy for Dale Hall. We are currently in the process of joining the Trust and I wanted to take the opportunity to explain more about what is happening.

Throughout most of last year, governors investigated the option of joining Penrose Trust, asking questions and listening to staff and leaders who visited schools in the Trust. The Trust has been transparent and supportive of our investigation and staff have kindly given their impressions to the governing body to help us in our decision making. The Head, staff and Governors have also met with the CEO, Sarah Skinner on a number of occasions.

What is an academy?

An academy is a school which is run by an Academy Trust, funding comes directly to the Trust from central government. A Maintained School like Dale Hall gets its funding from the Local Authority (LA) and is wholly owned by the LA. We are in the process of moving from LA management to Penrose Trust management and will become one of their academies.

A Trust is managed by a CEO, who answers to a Trustee Board and has an operational management team to help run day to day operations. It is a Not for Profit organisation and is subject to the rules and regulations of the Charities Commission.

Why do we believe that becoming an Academy in a Trust is best for Dale Hall?

We have enjoyed being a Maintained school and there is no criticism of the LA which proceeds our move. However as more schools in the area have become academies, the LA is less able to support schools. Suffolk actually recommends that schools join a Trust.

We believe that we will access more and better support from the Trust to manage the school and that it is in the best interests of the children. It will be easier for the academies in the Trust to collaborate and work together to share resources, expertise and knowledge. Staff will be able to network and develop their knowledge. We have strengths to share at Dale Hall but will equally learn from others.

Why did we choose Penrose Trust?

The Trust we have chosen has a mix of senior schools and primary schools. Currently there are four primary schools and four senior schools. More schools are in the process of joining so numbers will soon be higher. All the schools are in the East of England. The Trust is based in East Bergholt.

This means that the Trust is not so big that Dale Hall's voice is lost but at the same time it is big enough to pool resources and make significant savings of scale; a dedicated school improvement lead, qualified experienced financial support, a premises team and HR support are a few of the benefits. The Trust central team will get to know Dale Hall and have a vested interest in helping the school run efficiently and make the best use of resources.

The more work that we take away from the Head and Deputy in managing this side of running the school, the more they can concentrate on the education and opportunities for our children. Mrs Dedicoat will also have access to support and advice from other Head teachers and the CEO of the Trust, who has been a Head of both a Primary and a Senior School. Being able to share concerns and opinions between head teachers will be of enormous benefit to all schools in the Trust. Mrs Dedicoat is a confident and experienced Head but this will future proof the support system around the leadership team.

We have known for a while that we wanted to join a Trust, but we have taken our time to find the right Trust and then Covid struck and it was delayed. We were looking for a Trust whose ethos and child centred positive approach matched with Dale Hall. Collaboration between schools and a voice into Trust decisions was of huge importance too. The ethos of the Trust is inclusive, valuing relationships, respect, tolerance and celebrating achievement. As we have gotten closer to the Trust, we have seen a number of examples of actions which reflect the ethos. I am confident that the ethos is meaningful and lived as it is at Dale Hall.

I have seen passion, honesty and integrity and a real wish to enable schools to become stronger. I have personally met the CEO and The Chair of the Trustee Board and last year I worked closely alongside a member of the Trustee board helping another school not connected to the Trust or Dale Hall. Mrs Dedicoat has also met Heads and other staff of the Trust.

We have seen how proactive the CEO has been fighting for the Academies in the Trust regarding the RAAC concrete crisis, sharing her frustration and explaining the concerns on the Today programme, Sky News, EADT etc. She moved quickly to protect the 26 classrooms over 3 Academies in the Trust affected by faulty concrete, moving children to online classes and securing temporary classrooms at the same time as providing an educationalist's opinion and voice for the media.

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What will change?

For parents, I am not sure that you will notice any difference in your interaction with the school. Uniforms will not change, our school playing fields will not change. For children, we hope that the opportunities available to staff and to school leaders will strengthen the school and this should affect outcomes for children and the progress they make, which will make us all happy.

Staff will have access to a support network, career prospects and opportunities to grow their practice. This will help us to attract and retain the best teachers. The head will be able to focus more on the education of the children.

What happens next?

The school has not officially joined the Trust, we have one more vote of the governing body. I would describe our current situation as “subject to contract”. The lawyers are in process of finalising arrangements but it is also a time for you to ask questions.

Later this term, Mrs Dedicoat will arrange a meeting to learn more about the Trust. Help us to make the right decision for the school by asking questions, sharing any concerns and giving us your views.

If you have a query, please write to me at angela.gage@dalehallprimary.net. I will publish responses in a further bulletin later this term.

Assuming that there are no reasons to turn back, we are likely to become an Academy with Penrose Trust from **1 February 2024**. I am looking forward to meeting you at parents evenings, Share Afternoons (next term) and at the Academy Meeting later this term

Do share your thoughts.

Angela Gage - Chair of Governors

Email: angela.gage@dalehallprimary.net