

9th July 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

We are writing to inform you of an exciting development in the future direction of the AspirePlus Educational Trust and how this will support the ongoing improvement of Longdendale High School. As you will already be aware, Longdendale High School became the sponsor academy of the AspirePlus Educational Trust on the 1st July 2017. This was a hugely important milestone in the history of the school and at a time of national change in the educational landscape. The AspirePlus Educational Trust has played a significant role in enabling and supporting the development of many aspects of our school, including innovative approaches to teaching and learning, and most recently the development of a new curriculum, which has been recognised by a number of external bodies, including Ofsted, as being ambitious and supportive of meeting the needs of all groups of learners. Alongside this, the collaboration across the Trust has allowed us to share best practice across the schools as well as providing a platform to align many of our approaches, including: assessment and progress data tracking systems; management of attendance; core values and competencies; rewards; staff well-being; external partnerships such as the Alliance for Learning and the Ambition Institute; leadership of key subject areas through the appointment of Directors of Learning; inclusion and safeguarding systems and structures; approaches to appraisal; quality assurance and impact review processes; and overall school improvement planning.

This has supported the vision of the Trust to "support, challenge and collaborate in our endeavour to provide world-class education that allows our whole community to flourish". However, the Trust suffered significant challenges particularly in relation to funding and this has limited the capacity at Trust level to effectively further support the accelerated progress and improvement in both schools more widely. The Trust Board have been exploring a range of options in order to improve the wider capacity and provide the capacity needed to continue to drive and support school improvement. The preferred option and the one that they have pursued is a potential merger with another local Multi-Academy Trust to provide immediate capacity in support of improvement, a move that is being replicated nationally within the academy sector.

The Trust Board have looked to align with a like-minded Trust to be confident of developing a fully shared vision for improvement. Whilst facing some challenges, our Trust has a great many strengths and it has been important to create a strategic alliance that allows these strengths to be recognised and continued. Given our commitment to educational improvement in Tameside and due to previous collaboration, the Trust Board approached the Stamford Park Trust led by Ashton Sixth Form College.

Since the beginning of the academic year, discussions have taken place between representatives from the AspirePlus Educational Trust and Stamford Park Trust with the intention of transferring Longdendale High School and Rayner Stephens High School to Stamford Park Trust. This transfer was approved by the Regional Schools Commissioner in June 2020. A process of legal and financial due diligence will now take place before the final merger is confirmed.

Longdendale High School Spring Street, Hollingworth, Hyde, Cheshire, SK14 8LW **Headteacher:** Mrs A. Jones **CEO:** Mr M. Bowler
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It is worth remembering the context and history of our relationship with Ashton Sixth Form College. Alongside both Longdendale and the then named Astley Sports College, Ashton Sixth Form College was a founder member of the A+ Trust, a federation of schools and the college in Tameside with a vision to improve the quality of education and drive ambition for all in Tameside schools. Each school and the college agreed a shared vision and set of strategic aims to realise that ambition. This is still the case today for the college and both schools; we are ambitious for our young people and want to improve the life chances for each and every one of them. In recognition of the shared vision and values, an application was first submitted for the A+ Trust to become a multi academy trust in July 2014, with the sixth form college as the lead. This was rejected at that stage and as a result, in 2017 the AspirePlus Educational Trust was established as both schools joined forces as Longdendale was approached by the local authority to support Astley, which was a school experiencing significant leadership issues at the time. Whilst this offered the most appropriate solution in the context of 2017, the overall intention and desire to work collaboratively to build a wider trust model with the sixth form college has always remained a longer term aim.

The transfer of both schools to Stamford Park Trust to join Ashton Sixth Form College realises the vision of the A+ Trust. It provides an unprecedented opportunity to have a significant and long lasting impact on education and the young people in Tameside. It strengthens the already strong relationships and progression routes, offers an opportunity to develop pedagogy for the benefit of all, and supports a more collaborative and strategic approach to education within the borough. Anton McGrath the current Principal of Ashton Sixth Form College is also the CEO of Stamford Park Trust and is already working alongside the school's leadership team to support on-going improvement.

Earlier this academic year, Ashton Sixth Form College achieved an outstanding Ofsted judgement, and the new Trust focus will be on the development, capacity and impact in the two schools. The shared vision and values mean that this work will only seek to enhance the ongoing plans already in place for school improvement. The transfer does not affect the position of any member of staff currently working across the Trust or in either of the schools.

Although there is no statutory obligation for a consultation process, we are of course wanting to understand the views of all stakeholders to support the next stage. Please see the attached consultation document attached to this letter for further details regarding how you can share your views and questions for consideration as part of the process. This consultation period will remain open until 18th September 2020.

This is the start of an exciting and important journey for both of our schools as part of the Stamford Park Trust. We are confident that this will be extremely beneficial in strengthening both schools, and in providing greater opportunities for all of our colleagues, learners and the wider community. The Stamford Park Trust are gaining two highly committed and hard- working teams of staff, fantastic learners, and dedicated parents and carers, who are all committed to supporting their child's academic journey. We are looking forward to continuing to work with you all in a collaborative and supportive way, as we continue on our journey to provide a world class education to the young people of Tameside.

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Longdendale

H I G H S C H O O L

Yours faithfully,

Carol Thomas
Chair of Directors
AspirePlus Educational Trust

Yours faithfully,

Anton McGrath
CEO
Stamford Park Trust

Yours faithfully,

Andrea Jones
Headteacher
Longdendale High School

Yours faithfully,

Stephen Foote
Chair of Directors
Stamford Park Trust

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