



LONGDENDALE HIGH SCHOOL

We endeavour to achieve and aspire to be successful

14 November 2016

Dear Families,

Consultation regarding the proposal to establish a Multi Academy Trust including conversion to Academy Status

Background

As you will be aware Longdendale High School and Astley Sports College are both members of the A+ Trust. This collaborative working model of 7 secondary schools and a sixth form college within Tameside has proved very beneficial over the past few years and has supported all Trust schools in many areas of school improvement. Following the emergence of issues that needed to be urgently addressed at Astley, Longdendale and Astley developed shared leadership arrangements and, since January 2016, the relationship has consolidated.

For some time, the A+ Trust leaders have known that we are very well placed to strengthen the existing bonds between our schools and embrace the opportunity of forming a Multi Academy Trust (MAT). As an Executive Group we have been discussing the merits of this for the past two years. Following on from the successful partnership between our two schools, the A+ Trust, Local Authority and school governing bodies have been discussing how Longdendale and Astley may work together in a more formal capacity, which would allow for improved accountability, alongside greater flexibility and creativity within both schools. Following a period of discussion about the current educational context we have considered carefully the options available to us and what we feel suits the needs of both schools and the communities we serve the best.

Proposal

Senior leaders and governors at both schools do believe that the best way forward is to establish our own Multi Academy Trust which both schools can join. The proposed MAT, which would be named the ASPIRE+ MAT would be based on our ethos, vision and values. Longdendale would be the founding member school and Astley, given its current Ofsted grading, would be a sponsored academy within the MAT.

Our proposal was submitted to the DfE in September and discussed by the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Headteacher Board on Wednesday 12 October. I am delighted to inform you that this body has, in principle, approved the formation of the ASPIRE+ Multi Academy Trust, as it will be named. This means that Longdendale High School, has the opportunity to join the MAT as a converter academy and Astley Sports College, which is already under a Directive Academy Order can join as a sponsored academy.

Over time, and at the right point, we believe that the MAT will have the capacity to grow, initially with the possibility of other A+ Trust member schools joining.

This new MAT would seek to build on the partnerships and school-to-school improvement functions we have developed and the A+ Trust, Local Authority and DfE have all been very supportive of this proposal and recognise this as a positive development for education in Tameside and the wider local area.

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We believe that all of our students, staff and our wider school communities will benefit greatly from the formal partnership that MAT membership offers, which will include opportunities such as:

- A broader and tailored curriculum which suits the needs of our learners
- Potential for extended learning and enrichment activities
- Greater opportunities for sharing and exploring best practice within teaching and learning
- Bespoke professional development for teaching and support staff
- Greater accountability and responsibility for individual school leaders
- Resource efficiencies allowing for greater economies of scale

We do however also recognise that there can be common areas of concern when considering academisation or joining a MAT, such as:

- Potential loss of identity of individual school profile
- Potential loss of autonomy as a result of central accountabilities
- Potential short-term increase in costs before longer-term benefits are realised
- Isolation from the rest of the system
- Rapid growth of MAT causing capacity to be stretched and weakening individual schools

Whilst as leaders and governors we feel that we have carefully considered and researched all the available options open to us and arrived at the right proposal, we also recognise that it is important to consider the views of all our community.

Consultation

We are now opening up a period of consultation with staff, parents, carers and the wider community. The consultation period will run between **Monday 14th November - Friday 24th November**. We understand that this change needs careful consideration and as our community your views will be taken into account before final decisions are made. We will also be working with the staff and students to take account of their views in this important decision about their school.

In order to address some of the questions you may have a 'Questions and Answers' sheet has been included with this letter. In addition, 'Consultation Q&A drop-ins' will be held on Monday 21st November at Longdendale High School and Astley Sports College on Tuesday 22nd November.

These drop-ins will operate between 4-6pm where parents, carers and members of the wider community will be welcome to come into school and meet with school leaders and governors to ask any additional questions you may have. We have also produced a questionnaire which you can return to the school office and set up a dedicated email address for you to either return the questionnaire or send in any comments or questions and these will all be considered by the governing body. If you have any additional feedback on the proposal which you would like governors to consider please email either: consultation@longdendale.tameside.sch.uk or consultation@astley.tameside.sch.uk by **Friday 24th November 2016**.

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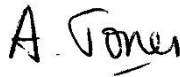
Following this consultation period, governors will consider a report containing all feedback received before making a final decision on whether to proceed with the proposal or not. If the Governing Body agrees to proceed with the proposal, we would seek to establish the ASPIRE+ Multi Academy Trust with both schools converting at an appropriate point. We will inform you of the outcomes of this process in due course.

Thank you for your continued support in our collective drive to ensure that Longdendale and Astley become world-class schools.

Yours sincerely,



Matthew Bowler
Executive Headteacher



Andrea Jones
Headteacher



Carol Thomas
Chair of Governors

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