



Highfields Academy

Together we inspire, always aiming higher

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Wednesday 16th February 2022

Multi Academy Trust update

Dear Parents and Carers,

On September 1st 2016 Highfields converted from being a Local Authority maintained school to being a Multi-Academy Trust (Star Academy Trust). Over the last 6 years this has proved to be a fantastic move for the school. The most noticeable changes that we've been able to make are setting up of our own preschool provision and also the significant improvements to our buildings and premises by accessing funding only available to academies. Over £1.5 million pounds has been invested in our facilities over the past few years. Many other less noticeable changes have also been implemented which have benefitted us in many ways.

Ever since we first converted it has always been a strong desire of ours to engage with and develop relationships with other schools so that the full benefits of being part of a Multi Academy Trust can be realised. Over the last 6 years we have worked very hard to identify schools who align with our aims, our vision and our ethos and who share our ambitions for the future. We have explored the possibilities of other schools joining Star Academy Trust, of merging our trust with other trusts and also of joining other established trusts in the area. Many meetings and conversations have taken place over the years and over the last 18 months the need to pursue these opportunities has become more pressing.

The Department for Education have made it very clear that in their view single school Multi-Academy Trusts are not a long-term viable option and I do agree with this view.

The Government policy:

The Government's current policy on Multi Academy Trusts is very similar to how it was in 2019, with MATs remaining as the preferred vehicle for securing school improvement. The decisive general election result in December 2019 ushered in a largely new ministerial team at the DfE, but it quickly became apparent that growing the number of schools in MATs continued to be a departmental priority. At the 'MATs Moving Forward: the power of governance' conference in March 2021, the then Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson, stated that more schools becoming part of a MAT was "something we want to see more of because it shows time and again how the MAT model consistently improves outcomes for pupils". This was followed by the commitment that by 2025 the government want to see far more

schools “residing in strong families than we do today” and that the DfE was “actively looking at how we can make that happen”.

Just over a year ago we began to pursue the idea of Highfields Academy joining an existing MAT, Concordia. We have been working together and as these relationships have developed I have become increasingly confident that this provides a fantastic opportunity to secure the long term viability and success of our school.

Over the last 6 months we have been working very hard to pursue this as a serious possibility. In December we received approval from the Regional School’s commissioner, meaning that should we and Concordia wish to progress this move further we would have the backing and approval of the Department for Education. Since this approval was gained we have been performing due diligence activities on each other, looking at areas such as teaching and learning, finance, health and safety, buildings and premises, and legalities. All of this has progressed very well and both Concordia and our Board of Trustees now feel the time is right to take this to the next stage where we communicate with our stakeholders about the potential move. This involves staff, parents and wider stakeholders.

As Headteacher of Highfields and as CEO of Star Academy Trust I am very excited about the potential of joining Concordia MAT. For several years we have been actively seeking partnerships with other schools and I believe that we have now found an organisation whose visions, values and ethos align with the direction that I want to take our school on in future years. The role of Trust CEO, Trust Accounting Officer and school Principal of a one school MAT is a complex one. Whilst teaching and learning always has to remain the number one priority there are many other areas that the job involves, such as : HR, Financial planning and compliance and audit, procurement/contract management , data protection, cyber security, estate management, policy management, health and safety and many others. Having the support of a skilled and experienced central team in these areas will enable me, and other senior staff to have more time to focus on what really matters – the quality of education for the pupils at Highfields Academy.

The views of others:

Mr Strefford, Vice-Principal of Highfields Academy commented:

“I am both excited and optimistic about the opportunities available for Highfields Academy (Star Academy trust) to join Concordia Trust.

There are clear and positive benefits for all stakeholders such as access to greater educational resources and support. It has become apparent, over the last year that working closely with this successful trust has helped Highfields in a number of ways from day-to-day curriculum matters to peer support with class teachers new to their role.

Other benefits would be a central team, capable of taking on the demands of HR, finance and Health and Safety. However, this is not a one way process. Highfields boasts a highly experienced set of staff that are able to support colleagues across

both trusts. The skill set amongst the staff is wide and varied, with colleagues keen to tackle new roles and responsibilities. Both trusts are similarly aligned, they share the same vision and ethos, but most importantly they both strive to provide the highest quality education for all children. Personally, this is the key principle and driver for conjoining."

John Mann Chair of Trustees, Star Academy Trust:

"I echo everything said by Simon Dyson. I believe that the move to Concordia MAT will provide several benefits that will ultimately further enhance the learning of our children as well as benefit the teaching of our children.

We will be part of a family of good schools that will enable us to share best practice and through economies of scale will reduce the administration burden and provide us with future financial stability. Equally Concordia recognise that Highfields will bring expertise and different perspectives that will generate fresh thinking and practice. "

Tracy Webb, Chief Executive from Concordia:

"I am really looking forward to the possibility of Highfields becoming part of Concordia Multi Academy Trust Family. Concordia Multi Academy Trust is now entering its fourth year of operation. The Trust decided that the time was right to begin to explore growth approximately 12 months ago. Structures were in place and the harmonising of systems were ready to support further development of the Trust. Discussions with Highfields began soon afterwards. It became apparent very quickly that there was a good cultural match and the aims of both Trusts were similar. Since that time, both the Highfields CEO and I have spent a great deal of time discussing plans for the future. We both recognised that relationships were so important and prioritised visits to schools and arranged for leaders from Highfields and Concordia to meet each other. Attendance at Executive meetings has ensured that relationships are already established."

We are sure you will have many questions. As a starting point please visit the Concordia website (<https://www.concordiamat.co.uk/highfields-academy>) for further information about Concordia and the benefits this will have for Highfields.

I am very keen to answer any questions too. Please let me know if you have any questions by emailing me at head@highfieldsnantwich.cheshire.sch.uk. Please make the subject of your email 'CONCORDIA MAT'.

Yours sincerely,

Simon Dyson
Principal