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19th April 2024

Dear Parents and Carers,

As you are aware the governing body formally agreed last term that Gainford C of E Primary and Pre-School should proceed to join the Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust. Durham Local Authority have supported this decision as the challenges of viability of tiny and rural schools become greater and agreed that working more closely with a neighbouring school (Ingleton Church of England Primary) as part of the Trust would make sense not just financially but also to further support both staff and children.

The target date for the school to join the Trust is the 1st September and during the time between now and then we will be working as a Trust with Mrs Riley and school staff to ensure a smooth transition. The question I know everyone would like to have answered is ‘Who will be leading the school and what changes will I see?’.

Ingleton Church of England Primary School is already part of the Trust and as you will know is also a small school which is geographically very close to your school. As a result of this we have agreed with the Academy Council at Ingleton and your current Governing Body that there will be shared leadership across the two schools. This is not a new innovation for either a Local Authority or for us as a Trust and moving forward this will be a common feature across smaller schools with benefits for both staff, pupils and leaders.

We are delighted to announce that Mrs Whitaker, the Headteacher at Ingleton, has agreed to become the Executive Leader across the two schools. Mrs Whitaker, who is already familiar with the school, is excited about the opportunity to lead the school through this change . We are also in the process of recruiting another Senior Leader to work with her to ensure both schools are working day to day as we could expect and so there is always someone senior in each school should there be any matters that arise and require immediate action. In reality this is rare and given the nature of the geography of both sites they are close enough for a member of staff to travel to the other school should they be required. Once we have finalised the recruitment, we will update all of you with who the successful candidate is. There will also be the opportunity for parents and carers, staff and pupils to meet with Mrs Whitaker in the near future. She is very eager to have this opportunity before the start of the new term in September.

Ingleton and Gainford are always going to be separate schools and retain their own individuality – as a Trust this is really important to us. However, over time there will be some changes which will mean the streamlining of the curriculum and resources and working more closely with Ingleton will also bring many other benefits. Staff in both schools have many strengths – we would like to share the strengths across both schools in a way that doesn’t interrupt children’s learning but enhances it.

The Trust operates a rigorous school improvement programme which will challenge and support both schools. This is something the staff at Ingleton are already familiar with and will become a feature across both schools. This means that staff will receive the support they need to ensure the curriculum and level of challenge is what it needs to be and look for opportunities to enhance what is already in place.

There will be no change to the uniform of the school or the name of the school as a result of the conversion to becoming an academy. The only difference you will see is a small sign on the building saying you are part of the Trust and a company number that by law has to exist on your letterhead.

As I have already alluded to, budgets are challenging for tiny rural schools but as a Trust we have schools in Northumberland of a similar size who are very successful and remain at the centre of their community. We know how important that is and want to continue the work and success of both schools serving the local community.

I will be in touch with all of you again with further updates. In the meantime, should you have any concerns you can speak to Mrs Riley or email me directly at paul.rickeard@dndlt.co.uk. As a Trust we have 18 schools so I cannot promise to respond immediately but either I or one of my team will get in touch as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely



**Canon Paul Rickeard**

**Chief Executive Officer**

**Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust**