

Willow Tree Community Primary School



Wetherby Road
Harrogate
HG2 7SG

01423 883551
admin@willowtree.n-yorks.sch.uk

Headteacher: Dr Helen Davey

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Dear Parents and Carers,

The Governing Body would like to let you know that we are considering making some changes to Willow Tree's status as a Local Authority School and joining a Multi Academy Trust. Whilst there are some significant changes that would bring essentially it would mean that we would no longer be school controlled by the Local Authority and our funding arrangements will change from being LA funded to being DFE funded.

This decision has not been taken lightly. The Governors have kept a watching brief on this change for the last 8 or so years but have never felt it was necessary or the right time to explore this option. However a number of issues have arisen which have led the Governors to reflect on the best way forward for Willow Tree, and these can be summarised as follows:

- **Government Messaging:** The last few months has seen a significant increase in messaging from the government, in their desire to see "all schools become part of multi academy trusts"; effectively adopting a single model for schools across England. Therefore before we are forced to join a trust, there is a real need to ensure we take a proactive rather than reactive position, in ensuring Willow Tree secures the best possible future for our school community.
- **Local Authority support:** As a state school the support provided from North Yorkshire County Council has been diminishing over the last few years, as staff capacity has become more limited, and it is increasingly more difficult to secure the necessary support that Willow Tree would like to access.
- **Capacity:** Whilst Willow Tree responded positively to all the significant challenges of the past 12 months, it has been very difficult to cover all responsibilities with limited support that is now available from NYCC.

In all our discussions in the past, when we have considered the role of MATs and the future of Willow Tree there have been several concerns, almost our 'red lines' and these include:

- Willow Tree to retain its identity and not be subsumed by the MAT
- SLT to be able to develop priorities, actions, etc. as they do at present, working with the Governing Body
- The MAT must share our vision for inclusion and access to education for all

The benefits of joining a MAT include:

- Collaboration, partnership working, being part of a family of schools
- Targeted support for school improvement
- Staff development opportunities both in school and in the MAT
- Coordinated/supported CPD
- Centralisation of some functions freeing up time and resources
- Time, space and support for the next Ofsted

Northern Star Academy Trust (NSAT) has been identified as a MAT that has the potential to 'fit' with the Willow Tree ethos. They are a small Trust with just 8 schools across Skipton and Harrogate. Local Primary Schools within the Trust include Hookstone, Starbeck and New Park. Having had a series of initial meetings with the CEO Jenn Plews the Governors have begun a due diligence process to see if this is something we want to move forward with.

There will be an opportunity after half-term to find out more about the Trust as part of the formal consultation process and learn more about the process that we are going through to secure the best possible future for Willow Tree. We will let you know the arrangements for these meetings in due course. However, in the meantime please feel free to check out NSAT online (www.nsat.org.uk) and take a look at their vision and priorities.

Jane Beasley
Chair of Governors

Helen Davey
Headteacher