

Mr. Warren Carratt
Chief Executive Officer
Nexus Multi Academy Trust

Thursday, 27 May 2021

Colleagues,

Nexus MAT 5-Year Anniversary: An open letter

1 June 2021 marks the 5-year anniversary of the opening of Nexus Multi Academy Trust, a landmark I didn't want to let pass without there being some form of acknowledgement. Everything that Nexus has achieved is the sum total of our staff, their efforts, and their commitment to the families we serve; none of this would have been possible without them. Whilst an open letter isn't the most prestigious of celebratory activities, it does give me a chance to outline the strides we've taken, together, over the last half-decade, from the small steps we started taking 6 years ago.

The Trust first came into being when formed by Abbey, Hilltop and Kelford schools. Back in 2015 - when the governing boards of the 3 schools committed to pursue conversion and to create a new Trust - David Cameron had just won a majority, the Department for Education (DfE) was consulting on enforced academisation of all state schools, both Sheffield football teams were on the up, Adele's 'Hello' was taking the charts by storm, and the United Kingdom was a fully committed member of the European Union. At least Adele's still about...

Move forward to 2016 and within a month of creating Nexus MAT we were approached by the DfE to sponsor Pennine View School, which had been found inadequate by Ofsted in a recent inspection. To be faced with the sponsorship of a special measures school so early in our existence presented some challenges for our new MAT, but our commitment to the values that we brought into the Trust has seen the school thrive in its time with us, and vice versa. Two months after forming, we were approached by Rotherham Council to deliver their short breaks/extended schools provision, something we have built up over time to be a truly inclusive and eclectic offer for children with special education needs in Rotherham.

Every year of our existence, Nexus has continued to grow and develop. Our special schools have created more and more places in the face of continually rising demand, and our sites have had more capital investment to improve the buildings than they'd had in the entirety of the previous decade.

Learning together, to be the best we can be.

In early 2017, we were successful in bidding for two new special schools in Doncaster and Sheffield. In late 2017, Craggs expressed an interest in joining the Trust and we started to develop a partnership which ultimately led to academisation.

In early 2018, we were invited to meet with the governors of Becton school to explore conversion and, later that year, we were approached by the governing boards of Coppice, Heatherwood and North Ridge to do the same. Academisation followed in late 2019 and early 2020.

Whilst we worked hard through 2019 on the conversion of the 5 schools, the September of that year saw the opening of Milestone House, the Landmarks College site we helped co-create to increase pathways and choice for our special school leavers. Year on year, this provision continues to increase in demand and goes from strength to strength.

In September 2020, we opened the first of our new schools, with Bader Academy opening its doors for the first time. Looking to September 2021, we will be opening our new co-located learning hub at The Bridge for our Doncaster learners, a site which was a de-commissioned former Pupil Referral Unit, which we have taken on and secured investment in. All of our academies continue to not only grow, but flourish, and the Trust will continue evolve.

Growth of the Trust, however, is not the end we seek: growth is the means through which we've been - and are - able to do more, with like-minded schools to make the best offer we can for children and their families. Preceding each point of growth, we have been approached by schools who share our values and who wanted to explore conversion with us because – **together** – we can do more for others. **Together**, we can support and challenge one another to be the best we can be. **Together**, we constantly redefine what 'the best' is.

The values of the Trust - Caring, Nurturing, Child-Centred, Family Focused, Encouraging, Enriching, Empowering, Passionate, Inclusive - came from the workforce at the time the Trust was formed, and we sense-checked these with our larger workforce in 2020 in our first employee opinion survey.

Given how and why the Trust has grown, it is not surprising that our employees fed back that these values are as important now as they were 5 years ago. These values have stayed at the heart of our decision making throughout, and will continue to guide us in all we do. At times, this has meant that people have left us, because there hasn't been alignment between our values and their own. Other times, people have left us because it's been the right thing for them. Either way, change is a universal constant and something we should never fear or regret, as long as we maintain true to our ethics.

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It frustrates and amuses me that – whenever a school leadership team decides on a change in policy, practice or a decision is taken locally, and especially where this isn't a popular measure – people assume it's happened because that school is an academy. The reality is that almost all the changes that happen in our schools occur because local governors and/or school leaders have determined that's a necessary change for their school community. Our Trust model has always been to abide by the principles of enablement and facilitation, supporting our school leaders to do the best jobs they can, however we define that. That will likely look different from school to school. However, as long as we are all aligned in our commitment to the values of the Trust, then we should always believe that we are doing the right thing. Where we have divergence from those values, other changes soon follow.

On this, our fifth birthday, I would like to use this open to letter to once again acknowledge the huge contribution volunteers make to the work of our Trust and our academies. Trust Directors and local governors continue to be the guardians of the public institutions that paid professionals lead and manage daily. We are accountable to them for the custodian role we hold with our schools, as they are, in turn, accountable to the public we serve.

Since the Trust formed, we have seen changes to our governance membership as people have come and gone, and for the academy trust as a whole, I would like to thank Helen Bellinger, Amanda Benton, Tracey Brooke, Catherine Hall, Nick Hodge, John Irwin and Alan Meloy for their service as named Directors of the Trust.

Our Trust couldn't exist today without our Members, who are akin to shareholders of the Trust and who hold the Board of Directors to account, whilst also being unpaid volunteers. We're all hugely indebted to Andy Child MBE, Paul Girling, Catherine Hall, Peter Leach, and Zanib Rasool MBE for their willingness to hold the legal responsibilities for our Trust that Members carry.

I'm equally grateful to the wonderful people who sit on the Board of Directors today and – as unpaid volunteers – give so much of their time for the Trust and our schools. Thank you to Andy Child MBE, Gillian Askew, Steve Booth, Peter Castleton, John Coleman, Naveen Judah, Ray Palmer, Rachel Potts, Sue Shelley and Jo Smith for their unwavering dedication, support and challenge. Without their daily efforts, Nexus MAT would not exist. Simple as that.

So many people have touched the life of the Trust over the past 5 years, and it would be difficult to name everyone who has helped us on our journey since 2016. From my perspective, special mentions go out to Dawn Allan (who's still with us at Kelford), Bev Findlay, Jill Fowler, Diane Hyner,

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Rob Mulvey, Clare Southwell and Jill Walker for their contributions to the development of the central Trust, all of which has helped us become what we are today.

Equally, I would to pay testament to all those who work across all areas of our Trust today, as their daily efforts continue to push the boundaries of what we can achieve with and for children and families. Headteachers and senior leaders have showed unbelievable courage and resilience in leading public intuitions through such unprecedented times and I could not ask for a more selfless and dedicated team of individuals. It is my privilege to work with so many genuine and good people.

The last 5 years have been a roller coaster, with far more ups than downs. I've reflected on some of our achievements here, **the only thing I'm more proud of than what we've done: is how we've done it, together.**

Here's to the next 5 years!

Yours gratefully,



Mr. Warren Carratt
Chief Executive Officer
Nexus MAT

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