



Dear Parent/Carer,

17<sup>th</sup> June 2020

### **New future for the school**

Today we are announcing an exciting new future for the school and our families.

CHAT Academies is the Trust that runs 5 schools, including Woodpecker Hall Academy. As Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Trust I have overall responsibility for managing the schools, working very closely with the headteachers.

The decline in the numbers of primary aged children across Enfield and Edmonton applying for school places is causing problems for many schools. It is a particular problem on the eastern side of the Borough, where our schools are located. Headteachers from all over the Borough have regularly met to discuss this issue over the past year.

The fall in the numbers of pupils applying to come to Woodpecker Hall (and Cuckoo Hall Academy which we also manage), due to these demographic changes, has been the subject of a great deal of careful consideration by the Trust in recent months.

Additional factors, such as rising house prices, have made the area unaffordable for many young families, further reducing the numbers of children needing school places.

We are very proud indeed of the school and the dedication and passion of our teaching and learning staff. Working with the school, we have done everything we can to promote both the schools to fill places that we have at Woodpecker Hall and Cuckoo Hall - but the demographics of the area are against us.

Unfortunately, admissions for both schools for 2020-21 confirms the downward trend, with many places unfilled - a trend which is also set to continue in the longer term.

### **Financial impact of declining pupil numbers**

The decline in pupil numbers is very serious because of its financial impact on each school.

Schools essentially receive funding for each pupil they have, with various top up grants.

This has already therefore, meant a shortfall of £400k in funding, which the Trust has had to cover to run the schools since September.

This huge level of financial support from the Trust as a whole cannot continue.

I have met with the Council and the Director of Education to discuss pupil projections for the next 5 years. The local authority expects the decline to get worse, not better in the coming years.

### **New opportunity**

This does however, also provide us with a great opportunity, and we have looked at what we could do to secure the future of schooling on the site.

Our Board of Trustees has considered and discussed various options.

The agreed option is to start the amalgamation of Woodpecker Hall and Cuckoo Hall. This would bring the two schools together to create a new school. This process would start with a single leadership team being established across both schools from September 2020.

### ***The plan is to create a single, new school on the site with four forms of entry.***

Amalgamation will produce significant savings, which will make the new school sustainable in the long term to ensure that we can provide the best possible education to the children in our community.

We are also considering plans for a new school construction to be added to the Woodpecker Hall buildings to sustain four forms of entry.

This would be financed by releasing some of the land we own on the overall site for sale, bringing to the new area state of the art teaching and learning facilities. The longer term plan includes the development of much needed affordable housing and valuable new community amenities.

In the event that this project did not go ahead, we would still need to amalgamate the schools and make better use of both sets of buildings and work within a sustainable budget.

We envisage that most staff will not be affected by the changes: the reduction in posts will be kept to a minimum.

### **What happens now?**

There are legal requirements relating to consulting with any staff who may be affected. The overwhelming majority of staff in both schools will not be affected by these proposals.

As stated, the first phase of the amalgamation will be a single leadership team being established for both schools.

This will result in one headteacher for both schools and a reduction of some senior leaders across the two schools in the coming months.

I know some of you will ask if we can wait until there is a resolution, for example, to what is happening with Covid-19.

The truth is that unfortunately, we do not know when that will occur. Critically, we have to do what is best for our families and community by taking action, addressing the very serious financial position, and planning for the future now.

*Covid-19 makes it even more imperative that we invest every possible pound that we can in the education of our children as they will face needing to overcome even greater hurdles following this pandemic.*

Our mission as a Trust is to provide outstanding education and life changing opportunities for all our children. Moving forward, amalgamating the two schools will help us achieve this goal.

I must emphasise that the status quo option of running two separate primary schools Woodpecker Hall and Cuckoo Hall, just a few metres apart from each other, is simply unsustainable.

Avoiding taking action now would be letting our families and staff down and critically failing in our duty to the children of our community.

There will also be a chance for parents to let us know their views, ideas and suggestions for the opportunities provided by amalgamation in shaping the new school ahead. We will be making a further announcement about how we will do this.

I will keep you regularly updated in the weeks and months ahead.

Yours faithfully,



Marino Charalambous  
Chief Executive Officer

## Questions and Answers

**Q: What does amalgamation actually mean?**

A: Amalgamation means bringing the two schools together to create a new school. This process would start with a single leadership team being established across both schools from September 2020. Eventually, the school would have a new name.

**Q: Is the decline in numbers just a problem for our school?**

A: No: There is a major decline in the numbers of primary aged children across Enfield and Edmonton applying for school places which is causing problems for many schools. It is a particular problem on the eastern side of the Borough, where our schools are located. Headteachers from all over the Borough have regularly met to discuss this issue over the past year.

**Q: We are very happy with the school. Why can't the situation stay the same, with both schools just using less classrooms in the schools, with smaller class sizes, to cope with the declining numbers?**

A: Doing nothing is not an option. Running two separate primary schools, just a few metres apart from each other, is simply unsustainable. There is already a shortfall in funding of £400,000. Schools are very largely funded on the basis of how many pupils they have. The fewer the pupils, the fewer the numbers of staff that can be afforded. The local area can no longer sustain 6 forms of entry each year - that is 180 children. Pupil numbers have been in decline for the last 3 years in Enfield and this has had an impact on our schools.

**Q: Why can't the Trust continue to make up the difference in funding?**

A: At £400,000 per year, and with that set to increase further, this is not an option. It is also not necessary with the plan that we are putting forward for the future. Covid-19 makes it even more imperative that we invest every possible pound that we can in the education of our children as they will face needing to overcome even greater hurdles following this pandemic. Avoiding taking action

now would be letting our families and staff down and critically failing in our duty to the children of our community.

**Q: If the school wasn't part of a Trust couldn't we just ignore this, get by and see if the numbers pick up?**

A: A standalone school in these circumstances would face needing to make significant cuts to teaching jobs over the next few years and would have far less room for flexibility that we have as Trust. The Borough pupil projections show significant decline continuing over the next 5 years. Being part of a Trust - a family of local schools - means that we can get through this challenging period because of the combined resources that we have. It has allowed us to try and improve pupil numbers over the past two years, as well as providing the time and space to pause and reflect on what is the best solution for the future. The Trust also has the capability and the resources to put in place a plan to ensure children in our community will continue to have a great school to go to through an amalgamation project of the type we have proposed.

**Q: Is this really the right time to be making such changes when we are in the middle of the Covid-19 crisis?**

A: Yes. Avoiding taking action now, would be letting our families and staff down and critically failing in our duty to the children of our community. Covid-19 makes it even more imperative that we invest every possible pound that we can in the education of our children as they will face needing to overcome even greater hurdles following this pandemic. A £400,000 deficit is not sustainable and will impact on the children's learning because we will be able to afford less and less teachers and resources. Amalgamation, in carefully considered and managed stages, provides an ambitious but viable solution and one that will help us to meet our mission to provide the children in our care with the best possible educational chances at this critical stage of their lives.

**Q: Did you consider options other than amalgamation?**

A: Yes. The fall in the numbers of pupils applying to come to Cuckoo Hall (and Woodpecker Hall Academy), due to the demographic changes, has been the subject of a great deal of careful consideration by the Trust in recent months. We believe amalgamation is the best option for the future. It will create a single, sustainable new school on the site for the next decade, with four forms of entry, and with great teaching and learning resources for the children. Our mission as a Trust is to provide outstanding education and life changing opportunities for all our children. Moving forward, amalgamating the two schools will help us achieve this goal.

**Q: Does this mean the school is closing and I will have to find another school for my child?**

A: No. Your child will continue to attend either Cuckoo Hall or Woodpecker Hall as usual. When we get to the stage of making better use of the buildings in both schools, different classrooms and study areas may be used. Over the next 12 months, as a family, you will notice minimal changes.

**Q: Will I need to buy a new uniform for the amalgamated school?**

A: No. There will be no uniform changes for the foreseeable future.

**Q: How do we know the numbers of children needing school places won't rise? I am always reading in the news that more school places are needed.**

A: The numbers of children needing primary school places varies from area to area and changes over time. Numbers will also fluctuate due to a range of different factors, some of them specific to the local area. Admissions for both schools for 2020-21 confirms the downward trend, with many places unfilled. The two schools became very popular and grew in recent years, attracting 6 forms of entry each year between them – around 180 children – as local demand grew. Some of our families may remember that 10 years ago, Cuckoo Hall only had 200 pupils and eventually grew to over 950 pupils

at its peak. I have met with the Council and the Director of Education to discuss pupil projections for the next 5 years in our area. The local authority expects the decline to get worse, not better in the coming years. We are confident that over the next 10 years we can sustain a school with four forms of entry of the site.

**Q: If there are pupil projections, why didn't you know this was going to happen?**

A: We have identified the decline as early as possible and are acting on it in advance of it getting more significant. Factors such as house prices in Edmonton rising steeply has further caused families with young children in the area not to be able to afford to live here anymore. We are very proud indeed of the schools and the dedication and passion of our teaching and learning staff. Working with the schools, we have done everything we can to promote both the schools in order to fill the places we have at Cuckoo Hall and Woodpecker Hall - but the demographics of the area are against us.

**Q: How can you say that this is also an opportunity?**

A: By acting early and with a considered plan to move forward we can ensure that the children in our community have the best possible education in the future. We are very proud of the schools and our staff. Amalgamation will produce significant savings which will make the new school sustainable in the long term. We are also considering plans for a new school construction to be added to the Woodpecker Hall buildings to sustain four forms of entry. This would be financed by releasing some of the land we own on the overall site for sale, bringing to the area state of the art teaching and learning facilities. The longer term plan includes the development of much needed affordable housing and valuable new community amenities.

**Q: What happens if you are not able to add these new school buildings to Woodpecker?**

A: In the event that this project did not go ahead, we would still need to amalgamate the schools and rationalise the use of both sets of buildings and work within a sustainable budget and a single leadership team ensuring progress and strong learning outcomes for all children.

**Q: Will you be making savings by making teachers redundant?**

A: Amalgamation will initially result in one headteacher for both schools and a reduction of some senior leaders across the two schools. The overwhelming majority of staff in both schools will not be affected by these proposals.

**Q: What is going to happen next?**

A: The first phase of the amalgamation will be to establish a single leadership team being for both schools for September 2020.

**Q: Will parents be able to have a say in how the amalgamated school moves forward?**

A: Yes. This is a chance for parents to let us know their views, ideas and suggestions for the opportunities provided by amalgamation. We will be making a further announcement about this exercise.