



Dear Parents/Carers,

2 July 2020

Nicky Ross appointed Headteacher for the amalgamated school at Cuckoo Hall and Woodpecker Hall Academies

I am writing to tell you that Nicky Ross, currently the Headteacher of Cuckoo Hall Academy and the Leader of Primary Education for the Trust, has been appointed as the Headteacher of the new school that will be formed from the amalgamation of Cuckoo Hall and Woodpecker Hall Academies.

Nicky has over 20 years' experience of leading, transforming and improving challenging and culturally diverse primary schools.

During her time at Hazelwood, she took the two large schools under her charge from 'Requires Improvement' to a 'Good' rating from Ofsted in July 2014, and then onto an 'Outstanding' inspection from the Local Authority. At Cuckoo Hall she has led the turnaround of the school over the past two years and has been praised by Ofsted inspectors for her work in improving teaching and learning.

Previously Deputy Headteacher at Chase Side Primary School, Nicky has also held senior positions at The Woodside School and Highlands Primary School in Ilford.

Nicky Ross is a very experienced Headteacher with a strong track record of success. Under her leadership, she will now take the two schools forward to ensure we have a successful amalgamation. Nicky impressed the interview panel with her ideas and plans for the future and her passion and commitment to creating a great school for the children and the community we serve.

We are now in the process of appointing the new leadership team across the amalgamated school and expect this to be completed shortly.

Nicky has asked me to pass on the following to you:

"I'm really looking forward to working across both schools with a very skilled leadership team. We will build on current successes and move forward together with a clear focus on our pupils and community."

"The amalgamation of both schools brings opportunities for us to learn from each other, improve on our curriculum and enhance our provision. The Senior Leadership Team and I are committed to all children and families in both schools and will work with the community throughout the amalgamation process. I look forward to getting to know our Woodpecker families in the coming months."

I would like to thank Sharon Parson for all her hard work over the past two years at Woodpecker Hall Academy. I know she will be missed by staff, parents and especially the children. We wish Sharon the very best in the future. I know she plans to send a personal message to families in her next newsletter.

Please note that your child will continue to attend Woodpecker Hall Academy 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 as the schools come together. We will, of course, keep you regularly updated with news about the amalgamation.

We have produced a Questions & Answer sheet below to help explain amalgamation, which we hope is useful.

If parents and families have any specific questions, they can also ask us a question about the amalgamation by emailing info@chat-edu.org.uk

Yours faithfully,



Marino Charalambous
Chief Executive Officer

Amalgamation on Cuckoo Hall and Woodpecker Hall Academies 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 than 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.