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Dear Parents and Carers

It is hard to believe that another academic year is drawing to a close. Again, it has been a year with some challenges, but also one marked by success and excellence. I would like to thank all parents, pupils and staff for their incredible hard work and support this year.

At this point in the year, most examinations and national assessments are completed, including those in our primary schools. I am delighted that our Year 1 children have again exceeded all national records with over 88% of children passing the phonics screening test. This early indicator of reading competence is an important step in any child's development and our combined score is some 6-7% above the national rate. Well done to the teachers, support staff, children and of course parents who have helped so many over this important hurdle. In Reception, over 80% of children achieved a Good Level of Development across the Trust – some 10% above national rates. This indicates that children have had an excellent start to school and can manage social situations well, are beginning to read, use numbers with more fluency and show learning across a wide range of other skills.

Higher up in primary schools writing scores have improved by 10% at KS1 and KS2. This is an area we have focussed on a lot this year and have seen significant advances. Although we have always had scores above the national rates, it was the weaker of the three prime areas of measure. We are still waiting for national test scores for Year 6 Maths and Reading, but know children worked very hard towards these. GCSE and A level results will also not arrive until mid-August, but I was impressed with how pupils across our schools managed these exams. There was real evidence of good preparation and a desire to do well from all pupils. My hope therefore, is that they have gone well for pupils and that overall, the schools in the Trust will again find themselves amongst some of the best in the country.

Throughout the year we have had the usual visits from Ofsted. All schools have either maintained their strong 'good' or 'outstanding' judgement, or have improved their grading. I was very proud of pupils and staff at Buckler's Mead Secondary School in Yeovil, who saw their school graded 'good', up from 'inadequate'. The school is a fantastic place to learn and work now and has a really bright future. Likewise, in our smallest school - Hemington Primary, Ofsted inspectors commented on the high standards and awarded Early Years with an 'outstanding' Judgement. Knowle DGE Special School in Bristol was also inspected recently and secured a 'good' judgement, up from 'requires improvement'. A fantastic achievement for Kate Lee-Wells - Headteacher and her team, in one of our most challenging schools. These improved Ofsted gradings mean that the Trust continues to transform schools and support them to provide a high standard of education.

I would like to take this opportunity to formally welcome to the Midsomer Norton Schools' Partnership, Frome College and Oakfield Academy. Both of these Frome schools bring a great deal of talent and expertise to the Trust and we are all looking forward to working with them over the coming months and years. We expect a further two schools to join by January 2025. We now have 34 schools and just over 15,000 pupils. This scale, whilst daunting to some, actually ensures that we can do all the things we set out to achieve as a Trust. This includes supporting schools with additional staff and giving expert advice across the full range of areas schools are responsible for. We are also spending record sums of money on school facilities – including a new Technology Block at Norton Hill Secondary, new toilets at Beechen Cliff, repairing roofs and extending classroom facilities at Hayesfield and refurbishing large parts of Buckler's Mead Academy. In our primary schools, we are committed to redecorating two schools completely over the Summer break and to updating worn out facilities. At St Matthias AP school, we are installing a hair salon for children to learn skills for the work place. Whether the improvements are to aid academic progress, support workplace internships, or just renew old equipment, I am always pleased to see money we have managed to save as a result of our scale and therefore collective buying, being used to enhance facilities.

The coming years will have plenty of challenges for schools. We know that funding will likely be a little tighter and therefore we will need to look at how we staff schools. We know too, that other services are less available to parents and pupils and schools often pick up issues now, that we may not have had to in the past. However, the most important thing for me as CEO, is to ensure we use our scale, knowledge and expertise to ensure standards in all that we do continue to rise.

Attendance of pupils is an area I mentioned in my last communication with you. Primary school attendance has recovered well from the pandemic. However, secondary school attendance remains too low nationally and whilst our schools are better than national in most cases, there are still too many children taking time off from school. The Department of Education is clear that this must be a focus for all schools and Local Authorities. Therefore, I would ask that you work with us on this, to help ensure your children are in school as often as possible.

We are also focussed on the following key improvement areas for 2024-25:

1. Improving mathematical fluency of children
2. Teaching and assessment of foundation subjects in primary schools
3. Improving the curriculum and teaching of science in primary schools
4. Improving further the precision of teaching across all schools to better meet the needs of children
5. Improving leadership at all levels in schools
6. Improving outcomes and opportunity for our most vulnerable children

Naturally, this is just a flavour of the key areas for development this coming year and the MAT improvement plan will detail many more, but this demonstrates that whatever the political agenda, we remain squarely focussed on raising standards for children.

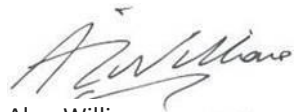
Over the course of the year we have made some new appointments to schools at a senior level. I am sure you will join me in wishing the following colleagues the best of luck in their new roles:

1. Mrs Clare England has been appointed as the substantive Headteacher at St Mark's Secondary School in Bath. Mrs England was previously a Deputy Headteacher at Writhlington School.
2. Mr Paul Balkwill has been appointed as the substantive Headteacher of St Dunstan's School in Glastonbury. Mr Balkwill was previously Deputy Headteacher at Buckler's Mead Academy in Yeovil.
3. Miss Isobel Mills has been appointed as the substantive Headteacher of St Julian's Primary School in Wellow. Miss Mills was previously the Head of School at St Julian's and now takes on full responsibility for the school.
4. Mr Duncan Powell (Trust Director of Secondary Education) has been seconded to Ansford Academy as Acting Headteacher from September 2024.

As the Trust employs close to 2,800 people, there will of course, be many more new staff starting with us in September and I am sure you will wish them a warm welcome. We also have some parents who will be following the apprentice teacher training programme we run. Many of these colleagues work for us already in a support staff capacity, or answered my plea last year to parents about interest in training to be a teacher. Naturally, you do need to be degree-level qualified, but if there are others interested, please do make contact. I hope that you all manage to enjoy some quality family time over the Summer and thank you once again for your continued support.

As a final reminder, please make sure that you check the return date in September via 'home-school' websites. Frome College will open for the new academic year to Year 9 and 12 on Thursday 5th September with other years starting on Friday 6th September.

Yours faithfully



Alun Williams
CEO