

7 December 2018

Dear Parent / Carer

Cumbria Education Trust - response to concerns about sponsorship of The Whitehaven Academy (TWA)

On 1 December 2018, Cumbria Education Trust (CET) became the proud sponsor of TWA. Whilst CET is now looking ahead with a focus on a brighter future for students and staff, it is acutely aware of the recent controversy surrounding the legal transfer of the academy to CET.

A public meeting was held on 22 November 2018 at the Whitehaven Golf Club, in order to air concerns about the departure of Headteacher Mr Turner and the sponsorship of The Whitehaven Academy by CET.

As the meeting was called at short notice and before the legal transfer was completed, CET declined being represented at the meeting as it would have been unable to fully respond to issues raised and did not wish to give partial or tentative answers which could fuel suspicion or be misconstrued. Instead, CET informed the meeting organiser, Trudy Harrison MP, that it would send an observer to the meeting, so that the issues could be noted, to allow CET to respond formally to the concerns that were publicly raised at such time as they were in a position to do so.

Many of the representations made at the meeting were factually inaccurate and potentially misleading. CET are keen to provide information so that parents and staff are presented with a more balanced picture. That is the purpose of this letter.

The aim is now to work towards repairing damaged relationships, building trust and confidence and proving that CET will operate in a manner that is fair, honest and transparent.

There is much hard work to be done to improve outcomes for students at TWA and CET acknowledges that this can only be done with a platform of support from those with an interest in the academy.

Our response is set out below under headings taken from the key points that have been raised.

1. The performance of schools within CET

It was said at the public meeting that the schools already operating within CET are underperforming and/or failing, rendering CET unfit to become the sponsor of TWA.

In addition to TWA, CET consists of 6 other schools – four primary and two secondary schools.

In the primary sector:

Yewdale Primary School, which was in 'Special Measures' before CET took over, achieved positive progress in Key Stage 2 Reading, Writing and Maths. The number of pupils achieving Expected Standards in each of Reading, Writing and Maths was above national average. In July, Yewdale Primary School had an Ofsted inspection where it was judged as 'Good' in all categories. Ofsted, in their inspection report, commented "the Trust and Local Advisory Board make a positive contribution. They bring a wide range of skills to support the school effectively".

Longtown Primary School, which had also been in 'Special Measures' before CET took over the running of the school, also achieved good Key Stage 2 results with pupils performing in line or above National Standard in Reading and Maths.

Results at **Yanwath Primary School** continue to improve from previous years with the percentage of pupils achieving the Expected Standard in Reading, Writing and Maths all well above the national average.

Tebay Primary School, which has a small cohort, has achieved good year-on-year progress.

KS2 results in all four primaries showed very significant improvement in all areas, when compared to the performance in the year before they joined CET.

Outcomes in Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) show that the percentage of pupils reaching a good level of development is above national average in all CET academies. Similarly, assessments at the end of year 2 showed that the percentage of pupils reaching the expected standard in each of Reading, Writing and maths is above national average across all academies. These figures indicate strong year-on-year improvement.

In the secondary sector:

William Howard School is the original and founding member of CET and has been recognised for its consistent high standards of performance both before and since becoming a member of CET. It is true that progress at the school dipped in 2018 as against very positive results achieved in 2017. The fact is that English and Maths results remained strong with the number of students leaving school with grade 5 in both subjects above the national average; similarly, at Grade 4 results matched the national average. Progress in English over the last two years is in line with the national average, with progress in maths above the national average in the same period. The progress made by disadvantaged students has increased by nearly a full grade since 2016. The school is on track to achieve positive progress with the current year 11. Sixth form results improved in 2018 with year 13 students achieving positive progress in their A-Level courses. Many subjects at A Level secured progress in the top 25% of schools nationally including Art, French, Spanish, Biology, Health and Social Care, History, Philosophy, PE and Psychology.

William Howard School has a very strong local reputation beyond the academic curriculum for its all-round education that includes its extensive International links, Extra Curricula provision, Performing Arts and overall ethos. There continues to be strong demand for places for students from outside of the school's catchment area, showing just how the wider opportunities available are valued by parents and students.

Achievement at **Workington Academy** is better than at both its predecessor schools (Southfield and Stainburn). At Key Stage 4, achievement remained strongest in English and Maths. Sixth form results showed significant improvement and year 13 students in both academic and vocational courses achieved positive progress, showing they made better progress than would be expected nationally. Among these, progress in English Language, English Literature, Further Maths, French, Religious Studies, Health and Social Care, Sport and Art showed progress in the top 25% of schools nationally. This validated the Ofsted judgment of 'Good' for the Sixth Form.

CET has recently appointed a dynamic Headteacher, who took his previous school from 'Special Measures' to 'Good'. He is driving the academy forward, as recognised by the 'Good' judgment for Leadership and Management in the recent Ofsted. Student Admissions are at an all-time high with year 7 intake rising by around a full class of students each year, from 104 students in 2015 to 186 students in 2018. It is very likely that there will be another significant rise in the year 7 intake next year, meaning the academy will be over-subscribed. The academy has, and continues to build, excellent relationships with the feeder schools. Cumbria Education Trust delivered a £15million, state of the art new build, which the academy moved into in February 2016.

CET aspires to recruit teachers of a high calibre to key posts. Both secondary schools are fully staffed with subject specialist teachers in all areas and on a trajectory for further improvement. In time we will look to ensure the same for TWA.

Tracy Stainton, Chair of the Local Advisory Board for Workington Academy has asked us to provide a quote in this communication to you: *"Having the support, expertise and passion of Lorraine and her team at Cumbria Education Trust has made a huge difference to Workington Academy. They have been there for us throughout our journey offering education guidance, encouraging staff to develop their careers, supporting pupils to aspire and realise their dreams and encouraging parents to get involved. The Trust is a locally based family of schools who support each other and strive for excellence for all their schools."*

David Warbrick, Headteacher of Beckstone Primary School in Workington provided this quote: *"Beckstone Primary School has forged many close links with Workington Academy and the Academy has been pro-active in developing these and supporting the life of the school. The Academy has supported the school's major community events... The contribution to these events has been invaluable. In terms of transition the Academy again has been very effective. Children from Year 5 and from Year 6 have had Literacy days, taster days and induction days. Our more vulnerable children have benefited from weekly transition visits as they near the end*

of Year 6 and the Academy also provide enrichment sessions for our more able English and Maths students on a weekly basis.”

2. The recent performance of TWA

Representations have been made recently to suggest that the performance of TWA was significantly improved.

Specifically, the Progress 8 score, which increased from -1.41 to -0.95 over the last year, has been cited as demonstrating clear improvement to the academy's performance. The academy has been cited as the 3rd most improved school in the county. It is misleading to quote any individual performance data in isolation.

TWA is nationally placed in the 98th percentile, i.e. the bottom 3% of schools in the country. In the last two years, it has moved from the very last percentile, the 100th position, to 98th. To achieve the national average result, it would need to reach the 50th percentile.

Students attending TWA achieved, on average, nearly a full grade less in each exam than their peers nationally, given the same starting point from leaving primary school.

Students attending TWA achieved, on average, nearly half a grade worse per subject than the minimum floor standard set by the government.

The Progress 8 score is of course a measure demonstrating some improvement and this must be acknowledged. However, the pace of improvement now needs to significantly increase, in order to provide children at TWA with an educational standard that provides them with the outcomes they deserve. School improvement is CET's key focus.

CET would like to acknowledge that the academy has many strengths. The students and staff are generally happy – there is a positive working atmosphere. We are looking forward to building on these solid foundations and creating a learning environment that is vibrant and engaging. We want to give students a wealth of opportunities to broaden and develop their aspirations. The new state of the art building that everyone (CET & the community) worked so hard to achieve will be fantastic for the students and the community.

3. The allegation that CET has a track record of dismissing Headteachers following takeover of schools

William Howard School has had stable headship in place throughout its time and was the original school converting to academy status, eventually forming CET.

CET took over Workington Academy and Yewdale Primary School in September 2015. Both schools had Headteacher vacancies prior to CET having any involvement or being named as preferred sponsor.

In September 2016, Longtown Primary school joined CET. The Headteacher chose to take up a new post in another local school in the 2017/18 academic year.

In September 2017, Yanwath and Tebay Primary Schools joined CET. Tebay had a vacancy for a Headteacher prior to CET being named as preferred sponsor. At Yanwath Primary School, the Headteacher was in place at the point of conversion and remains so.

4. CET and Union Recognition

It is alleged that CET have not signed a trade union recognition agreement. Such an agreement puts in place arrangements including formal consultation with unions.

CET recognises trade unions in relation to both teaching and support staff. All union representatives are consulted in relation to matters affecting employees of CET.

CET has the benefit of a recognition agreement put in place by the Local Authority, Cumbria County Council. The benefit of this agreement has transferred to CET under TUPE at the point each school transferred into the Trust.

This year, unions have suggested that CET may wish to enter into a new, bespoke, agreement which is up to date and more relevant to the structure of CET. CET agreed to this and a meeting was arranged (and took place) on 29 November 2018 to take this discussion further, with a draft agreement being presented for approval. This meeting had already been arranged before the date of the public meeting. It was therefore mischievous to suggest that CET did not have union recognition in place. CET regularly work with unions and have always had recognition in place.

5. CET and the alleged advertisement of the post of Headteacher for TWA prior to Mr Turner's departure

CET wishes to be very clear that it did not at any point in time place an advert to replace Mr Turner as Headteacher. CET have been made aware (by union representative, Mr Moules) of an advert for a Headteacher post based in Lancashire, which Mr Moules has openly purported to be a "ghost" advert for Mr Turner's role. Upon making enquiries with the London based advertising agency (Ignata), used previously by CET for senior level recruitment, they have issued CET with a written response. The following extract is reproduced below in unedited form:

- *Ignata Education has not been asked to place an advert for a specific Academy/School on behalf of CET nor has it placed one.*
- *As part of our continuing relationship Ignata has a 'watching brief' for CET where we have agreed to make you aware of any talent available. This involves discussions about individuals, sending CVs and is no different than any trust or school using a 'talent pool' to stockpile talent should the need arise to recruit at any level. This is common practice within effective proactive recruitment. It is also common practice to advertise generic roles in areas where there is potential need as much of the work we receive is from speculative approaches to Trusts, LAs and schools.*

- *We have been made aware that there is an issue with the Whitehaven Academy. We can categorically state that CET has never discussed the name of this school with us nor indeed asked us to place an advert for any staff within this school.*

Ignata has given permission to share this information with any relevant parties.

6. CET's recent recruitment to a post of Deputy Headteacher

CET have recently appointed a Deputy Headteacher to work within its secondary schools across the Trust. Allegations have been made that this recruitment was also planned to secure a potential replacement for Mr Turner. This allegation is simply unfounded.

Since the inception of CET 3 years ago, the Trust has been looking at ways of building leadership capacity for school improvement across the Trust. This year they received a grant (called a MDIF Grant) for this specific purpose. In October they used a proportion of this grant to appoint a senior leader (Deputy Headteacher level) to the Trust. The intention to do this was declared at the grant application stage in the early part of 2018.

At the point of advertising for this role, it was declared that the postholder's first deployment would be at TWA, to give immediately increased capacity to the academy. Mr Turner was involved in the discussions about this, as all acknowledged that TWA needed more leadership capacity.

The postholder is not however appointed to work solely at TWA – the purpose of this recruitment is to enable Trust-wide senior leadership capacity to be increased, to support leadership projects and school improvement across the Trust's schools.

7. The role of Mr Chris McAree, Headteacher of William Howard School, at TWA

Mr McAree is Headteacher at William Howard School. He is not, has not been and is not intended to become, the Executive Principal at TWA.

Under the service level agreement entered into by CET and the Bright Tribe Trust, CET offered to provide additional support to TWA, to strengthen school leadership resource. As part of this support, Mr McAree was released from William Howard School to TWA one day per week. The provision of additional support is a key benefit of being part of a local trust, as it enables resource and knowledge to be shared. In this case, it brought additional capacity to TWA.

The cost of the time given to TWA by Mr McAree was met through funding secured by CET in a bid submitted to the DfE via the Emergency Strategic School Improvement Fund. This money has also paid for new resources for staff and students, and improvements to the fabric of the academy.

8. Mr Turner, Headteacher

CET cannot engage in public discussion about any individual. It was announced that Mr Turner had himself come to the realisation that it was time for him to leave TWA and move on to another role. As a result, Mr Turner's employment did not transfer to CET. CET has every confidence in Mrs Bateson and her team, and they will in time seek to fill the Headteacher vacancy.

It has been alleged that CET lied about Mr Turner's absence from the academy on grounds of ill health. That is categorically denied and his absence was managed in line with the normal HR procedures i.e. Fit Note and return to work interview.

9. The impact on staff and students of Mr Turner's departure

It is reported to CET by the Senior Leadership Team at TWA that there is a will on the part of the majority of staff to engage with CET and look forward to the future. A small number of students have sought support from staff at TWA in connection with their feelings about Mr Turner's departure.

It is undeniable that TWA has been through a very difficult period both under the management of Bright Tribe Trust and in the transition to CET. Students in particular have expressed clearly that they want to come out of the limelight of the press and public. We very much hope that the community will help us to establish stability and to create a positive learning environment for the students.

10. CET attendance at meetings – allegations about transparency

Meeting with the Mayor Mike Starkie - it is alleged that CET failed to attend a scheduled meeting with Mayor, Mike Starkie. This is incorrect. CET were in communication with Mr Starkie's office about a meeting. A meeting date was offered by CET however this was not confirmed. CET has received an apology from the Mayor's office in relation to this matter. A date for this meeting has now been confirmed.

Public meeting - CET understands that suspicion arose from their lack of attendance at the public meeting on 22 November. The CET Trust Board of Directors were not invited to the meeting. Lorraine Hughes, CEO, was invited. Mrs Hughes wrote to Trudy Harrison on 20 November explaining that CET felt unable to attend prior to completion of the transfer, as much detail remained subject to ongoing discussion. Mrs Hughes stated in her letter that there were many matters that were being reported that were factually inaccurate or misunderstood and that CET wished to be in a position to respond fully, having completed the transfer and being able to give more than just tentative responses which would potentially be misconstrued. Mrs Hughes concluded by saying that an observer/note taker from Burnetts (CET's legal advisors) would attend and that CET would subsequently then be happy to address any of the issues that were raised.

Looking forward

CET is aware that the strength of public feeling has been significant. This letter is issued to provide a response to the key concerns that have been raised through public and online discussions.

Neither CET nor any of its officers are part of a corporate “monster”, seeking to make profit out of TWA. CET is a local multi-academy trust, doing the best it can for local schools and children. We are fully aware of the need to be fair, open and transparent and will seek to rebuild relationships within the community and to prove, through results and school improvements, that CET is the right choice of sponsor for TWA.

CET has worked tirelessly with the DfE and the ESFA (funding agency) to secure a favourable deal for the academy moving forward. We are very much looking forward to a positive future and to updating you on our plans, including plans for the new build, as these develop.

CET is also delighted to have recently found an Aladdin’s cave of unused resources stored in a mothballed building on the TWA campus. This find includes textbooks, tables, chairs, printers, IT, catering and sports equipment (including trampolines). These resources will make a real difference to students and it is the intention to immediately deploy them for the benefit of the students & staff.

Sustainable school improvement takes time, commitment and the engagement and good will of many parties – particularly the students themselves. CET genuinely wants what is best for all its students and is looking to parents and the wider community to provide a calm, stable setting for learning to take place. We will be holding further parent engagement meetings in the New Year. We are also meeting with Trudy Harrison, MP and Mayor Mike Starkie on 10 December 2018, to discuss proposals for ensuring community involvement in the journey ahead at TWA.

Yours sincerely



Debbie Francis
Chair of Trust Board



Lorraine Hughes
CEO