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Dear Parents and Carers,

As I am sure you are aware last term Gainford C of E Primary School asked if they could join the Trust and work more closely with us to help their school continue to flourish. We as a Trust are conscious that over the past three years the demographic of both Ingleton and Gainford has continued to change and due to a decline in birth rates locally the number of children attending both schools has reduced. Sadly, school funding has not kept up with the rising costs associated with running a school and this has been ever more acute for our smaller schools.

When Gainford approached us, we started to look at what impact this could have on the schools and children and could we as a Trust make a positive difference sustaining both schools. This was always going to be a challenge but already we work with several of our schools in Northumberland that are tiny and rural and operate a model of shared leadership which has enabled this to happen. When you joined the Trust I said that where possible we wanted a headteacher in every school and this is still the case. However, as budgets have diminished and as rolls reduced, we have decided due to the retirement of their Headteacher Mrs Riley, that the time is right for Mrs Whitaker to become the Executive Leader of both schools.

So, what will this mean for you and your children. From September Mrs Whitaker will no longer teach but be responsible for the day to day leadership of both schools. She will not be alone in this role as we will seek to appoint/allocate responsibility to designated senior Teachers in each school to support her so there is always someone senior in each school should there be any matters that arise and require immediate action. In reality this is rare and given the nature of the geography of both sites they are close enough for a member of staff to travel to the other school should they be required.

However, working more closely with Gainford will also bring many other benefits. Staff in both schools have many strengths – we would like to share the strengths across both schools in a way that doesn't interrupt children's learning but enhances it. Currently staff are responsible for several subjects in one school, our aim is to share this across both schools in a more meaningful way which will allow staff to focus more on teaching and learning. Moving forwards we will be looking for opportunities to develop even stronger links between the two schools and those in the geographical area. The Trust already has Green Lane and Heighington as part of our family.

It is important to understand that Gainford and Ingleton will still remain schools in their own right and whilst staff may work more collaboratively, children will be taught their curriculum in their own school.

Prior to half term I hope to write to you again to update you on the leadership structure in each school and with any other information we feel able to share. I know there have already been lots of questions directed to both headteachers and the Academy Council and I would like to thank them for their patience whilst we have been working behind the scenes. The target date for Gainford to formally join us is 1st September, which aligns with Mrs Whitakers change of role to lead both schools.

Yours sincerely



Canon Paul Rickeard
Chief Executive Officer
Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Learning Trust