



# CEO Newsletter

## Dear parents and carers

Welcome back for the autumn term. I hope that you and your families have had a restful break. Our staff report that the children have come back to school and settled in well.

As I have previously reported in my newsletters, funding for schools has reached a crisis point all over the country. August was certainly a momentous month as the government announced £14.4bn more funding for schools, resulting from a high-profile NAHT campaign. This is a substantial injection of money for schools which, over three years, could make a real difference. At the same time, the teaching profession are not naïve and therefore offer a cautious welcome to this news. Whilst I do have reservations as to how this money will be distributed, one thing is beyond dispute; the government has finally acknowledged that it takes a multi-billion investment, from the treasury, to repair the damage of the devastating cuts we have seen since 2010.

There have been some excellent outcomes for many pupils across The Samara Trust including personal achievements for pupils in statutory tests, and end of year results. Many parents and carers have shared their appreciation of The Samara Trust's teaching staff. There are, however, some results which can still be improved. Principals and staff are working on their Strategic School Development Plans which will be shared once they are completed.

The autumn term will see us moving forwards with marketing for our academies as we seek to differentiate them, celebrate their successes and promote them within our communities. New websites are being developed for all schools; Upton Heath will be undertaken first in line with its new school building, followed by Clutton and Little Sutton. Branding guidelines have been developed across each school and The Samara Trust to enable each academy to retain and enhance its distinctiveness.

As many of you may know, Branching Out at Upton Heath has become a hub for forest school in the area, not only offering fantastic forest school sessions for our schools but also training education professionals up to Level 3 Forest School Leader. We are further developing Branching Out and Branching Out Training as distinct brands, which will not only differentiate our Trust and schools but generate income through training revenue over time. Generating consistent, positive press coverage for our schools has been a key focus. Between 15/04/19 and 10/09/19 we've had 21 pieces of press coverage (Upton Heath: 9, Little Sutton: 7, Clutton: 5) with an online circulation of 3,725,700, a print circulation of 243,978 and an estimated advertising value equivalent of £5473.40. You may view some of these pieces on each academy's and The Samara Trust's social accounts.



When we formed The Samara Trust we were under no illusions that all three schools were facing challenges regarding funding. We also recognised that by working together, there were financial benefits that would ultimately benefit all three academies over time, including:

- Joint procurement of resources including continuous professional development training.
- Joint tendering of services including gas, electricity and grounds maintenance.
- Procurement of catering and cleaning contracts through the National Framework.
- Pooling of employee pension contributions.
- Introduction of efficient accounting, payroll and HR systems.
- Purchase of high quality human resources (HR) and accountancy services.

These have led to savings for our Trust which, whilst small, all add together to help our three academies. We also understood that because of the continued challenges regarding government funding there were no easy answers to help solve the problem that our schools were overstaffed. As over staffing was clearly an issue for all three academies (especially as no academy was full to capacity) this meant we needed to make changes to ensure the viability of our academies and Trust. In October 2018 the principals started working with the CFO and myself to look at the budget staffing models. The board agreed that any changes would be with the understanding that we must develop a structure that not only delivers in terms of our ambitions for teaching and learning but also delivered value for money. Consultation was undertaken with the staff affected in all three academies and respective unions. This took place in the spring term and was extended so that we could consider feedback from staff and governing bodies. The Trust wanted to avoid the risk of redundancies. There were a number of strategies that we deployed to enable this to happen which included:

- The offer of redeployment to other posts within The Samara Trust.
- Reduction in working hours.
- Review the use of fixed term contracts and supply staff elsewhere in the academies and end these arrangements, where appropriate, to move at risk employees into posts.
- Early retirement.

This process was particularly challenging for staff. When the Trust board met in July 2019, I talked about some of the challenges that had been presented to the principals and myself regarding restructure and communications, and they acknowledged that it had been difficult. I would like to apologise to anybody who feels that communication was not good enough. We would never wish to be obstructive. We wanted to ensure that the staff, whose jobs were being consulted on, were always the first to hear about the changes made. As a parent or carer, I understand that what happens in your individual academy and how this impacts on your children is extremely important. I also recognise that the changes that the academies have had to make regarding staffing and class sizes have happened since the Trust was formed. One of the reasons we formed the Trust was to reduce the impact of the financial cuts that the schools faced. Whilst this may not appear to be so, please be assured that if the schools were not part of the Trust then the cuts to staffing would potentially be even more severe. Staff would have been made redundant.





I would now like to update you all on staffing in our Trust and let you know about the future changes that are planned for the remainder of this term. Mrs Farrow, Principal of Clutton C of E Primary School has taken early retirement from her post. Mrs Wendy Dorset, EYFS teacher at Clutton C of E Primary School has resigned from her post. I would like to thank them for the contributions that they made to the school and wider community. Mrs Jo Phillips as previously communicated, retired from the post of headteacher of Little Sutton C of E Primary School last Easter. She and Mrs Farrow were both leading contributors to the formation of The Samara Trust. As a result of the consultation, the structure that is now agreed by The Samara Trust is as follows:

- Executive principal, leading Little Sutton and Clutton C of E Primary Schools.
- Principal of Upton Heath C of E Primary School.
- Deputy principal/headteacher of Upton Heath C of E Primary School.
- Part time director of education (school improvement role) from September 2020.

The role of assistant headteacher is no longer sustainable in any of our academies due to low pupil numbers. This is not a reflection on the contribution that any of the assistant headteachers have made across The Samara Trust. It is simply that the posts are no longer sustainable. Our assistant headteachers have all had notable impact in our academies. Ms Jane Edwards has successfully led Little Sutton C of E Primary School as interim head of school in the summer term making significant contributions to the academy and its community. Ms Edwards will remain at Little Sutton and continue to work as part of the senior leadership team. Mrs Claire Randa, also an assistant headteacher at Little Sutton C of E has been redeployed to Upton Heath C of E Primary School to join the leadership team, after Mrs Sue Hughes (assistant headteacher/interim deputy principal of Upton Heath) secured a new position as a consultant for one of the companies that we use for professional development. Our assistant headteachers will continue to make a positive impact within the Trust in their different roles.

There have also been other members of staff who have left Upton Heath this term. I would like to thank Mr Huw Jones, Miss Kim Sands and Miss Kate Redmond for their individual contributions to the school. Mrs O'Leary-Davies has been able to appoint new staff to replace them, Miss Kerry Buckland and Miss Becki Williams. I hope you will join me in offering them a warm welcome to The Samara Trust. The timing of information regarding class structure and teachers has been raised as a concern by some parents. Potentially Clutton and Little Sutton staff were at risk of redundancy before the end of term. Positions at Upton Heath were available and redeployment was being planned therefore the decision was made to leave these open to enable staff from the other two schools to fill these posts. The timing of the resignation of Mrs Farrow meant that staff from Clutton did not need to be redeployed. This was only confirmed at the end of the summer term. The appointment of new staff to Upton Heath could then go ahead. As a result of this decision, I then had to secure the secondment of a headteacher to the position of executive principal for Clutton and Little Sutton very quickly. With the support of the Diocese and Dodleston Governing Body, we were extremely fortunate to gain the services of Mrs Julie Boyes. I must thank them all immensely for their kindness in supporting The Samara Trust academies in such a timely manner. Mrs Boyes has reported that the communities of Clutton and Little Sutton Primary have welcomed her warmly.

Moving forwards, we are advertising for the post of principal for Upton Heath and executive principal for Little Sutton and Clutton C of E Primary Schools. We are looking to appoint to these posts on the 24th and 25th September. The outcome of these appointments will determine if we need to appoint to the position of deputy principal at Upton Heath C of E Primary School. The decisions made mean we can balance the budget for The Samara Trust. If the leadership structure had continued, the cost would have been £428,818 however the new proposed structure will cost £237,068 (subject to securing the planned appointments). If this saving had not been made at leadership level, this would have inevitably led to teaching and teaching assistant redundancies .

We have many talented staff who are able to share their expertise and support one another. Working across the three schools, we hope to benefit our pupils and staff by enabling exciting and stimulating curriculums to be further developed; increasing opportunities for staff to share their expertise across the schools . Year 6 pupils in the mixed age year 5/6 class at Clutton who took their SATs achieved 100% pass rate across all subjects. This knowledge and experience will be used to support our staff across the other schools who are now delivering curriculum to mixed year classes. Mrs Boyes, who has extensive experience of leading schools with mixed aged classes, is also available to support Mrs O'Leary-Davies in supporting staff at Upton Heath.

The appointment of principals and the director of education will support our executive team. As the CEO, I provide leadership across the Trust, ensuring financial sustainability, co-ordinating the sharing of best practice to improve classroom standards. I represent the Trust to the Chester Diocese and develop strategy for the trust. This work was previously done by each of the headteachers of the three schools. Mrs Studley is the CFO who manages the finances of the Trust. Prior to the formation of the trust she was the business manager at Clutton. Finances at Upton Heath were managed by Mr Oakes and Little Sutton purchased support from the local authority. Mr Oakes leads on property management, health and safety, IT management and the new GDPR regulations. He has been working with the construction of the new build and is developing grant applications for capital projects at the other two schools. Prior to the formation of the trust Mr Oakes was the business manager at Upton Heath.

As a trust we follow the Academies Financial Handbook. If you wish to follow this link you will be able to see the accountability that we have to adhere to. We have been successfully audited by Hacker Young Accountants since the Trust was formed. The Trust's resource management was also reviewed in July. This was requested by the Chief Financial Officer. In the opinion of the adviser 'the Trust demonstrated some extremely good practice in procuring collaboratively and creating a contracts management database. This is not often seen in Trusts that are early in their growth journey as contracts and procurement are often an afterthought. The Trust should be commended on their approach to contract management and procurement and the savings they have already achieved, however there are still further opportunities.' Any recommendations that have been made by auditors or reviewers are scrutinised by the board who hold the CFO to account. We will continue to work to improve our financial position despite the challenges of funding that we face. Unlike maintained schools, multi-academy trusts have to be audited and publish their accounts. There is much more financial transparency and checks on financial probity than for voluntary controlled schools. Our accounts, including the unqualified opinion of our auditors can be found at Companies House. We also have to provide regular financial returns to the Education and Skills Funding Agency, which is part of the DfE.

Please be assured that we understand the frustrations that have arisen recently. We welcome your support and comments to enable us to reflect on our successes and build confidence within the Trust. Finally, we will be looking to appoint new trustees and governors to our boards this academic year and there will be opportunities to apply. We would welcome anyone who would be interested in finding out more to email us on [feedback@thesamaratrust.cheshire.sch.uk](mailto:feedback@thesamaratrust.cheshire.sch.uk) to arrange suitable times to meet. We would also like to continue to use this means of communication to ensure we are able to answer any queries when they arise; hear about any ideas that you have to support the academies moving forwards and to share any opportunities that you may feel would benefit the children within The Samara Trust. Apologies for the length of this newsletter, however, it has been long overdue and I am now at liberty to fully inform you of the developments since my last communication. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you, our parents and carers, for your continued support.

**Paula Conlin (née Moreton)**  
**CEO**