



24th January 2023

Dear Parents and Carers,

We promised to keep you all informed about our progress with regard to the Headteacher position for Grindleford. We will summarise the background first of all.

When Mrs Boulton announced she was leaving it left the Governors with insufficient time to appoint a new HT for the September 2022 term. Terms and conditions for Headteachers are bound by national agreements and notice dates are set making it quite difficult.

We opened the vacancy to other Headteachers in the cluster on the advice of Derbyshire County Council (DCC) and we have followed their guidance throughout the process. Two Head Teachers expressed an interest in providing temporary support whilst we completed our recruitment. Governors met and interviewed both candidates and were pleased to appoint Mrs Gemmell to the temporary post of Executive Headteacher. We felt that Mrs Gemmell's knowledge, skills and experience would provide us with a good solution and we felt that she would fit well with the ethos, vision and values that we hold at Grindleford Primary.

This "appointment" was very much on an informal basis and Mrs Gemmell started in September 2022, dividing her time between Grindleford and Bamford. We also held helpful meetings with some of the Governors of Bamford Primary School to reassure both ourselves and Bamford School about the terms and expectations of the new arrangement.

We advertised the post of Headteacher over the summer and had a closing date in September for the post, which would allow us the potential to appoint from January 2023 (or at the latest, by the beginning of the Summer 2023 term). Unfortunately, we only received two applicants and the shortlisting committee (comprising nominated governors, a representative from DCC Human Resources and a DCC Senior Advisor) thought that the candidates were not strong enough or suitable for short-listing.

Mrs Gemmell has been with us now for over a term and faced many challenges and is working very hard with our team. As far as we are concerned, Mrs Gemmell is doing a really good job in difficult circumstances.

We have been advised by the Local Authority that the informal arrangement we have with Bamford can't go on forever. Working through the Local Authority guidance, we have now signed and lodged with the Local Authority a Memorandum of Agreement between the two schools. This formalises our temporary collaboration and sets out the processes that we are working through. It also provides a timeframe by which we must conclude our temporary working.

The guidance says that schools can opt to enter a Formal Collaboration:

*A step towards federation, where a governing board collaborates with one or more*

*schools, with one executive headteacher providing overall leadership in all the schools. The individual schools retain their full governing boards but have to establish a joint committee made up of designated governors from each school, to oversee the collaborative arrangements and the well-being of the executive headteacher.*

**This is not the same as joining or Forming a MAT (Multi Academy Trust).**

The Governing Boards of both schools have entered into a time-bound Memorandum of Understanding which ensures that we have short-term stability whilst we explore the option of more long term collaborations. This will allow us to look in detail at the potential benefits and pit-falls of such a partnership whilst leaving the door open to reverting to and recruiting our own Headteacher if this option is preferred. Equally, with the issues around funding and recruitment, we are able to fully explore if there would be benefits to working in a Federation more fully. You may be aware that many small schools throughout the country have opted to Federate. It is also a model which the LA advocate as a suitable and beneficial model for small schools.

We want to assure you that we have staff in place to take responsibility for things when Mrs Gemmell is at Bamford. Miss Moore is the Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead and Mrs Slack the Senior Teacher on site (given Mr Pett's ongoing absence). Additionally, Mrs Gemmell has already demonstrated flexibility and our collaboration with Bamford has allowed this flexibility.

That is where we are at the moment: a joint committee has been set up with Governors from both Grindleford and Bamford and we have a formal Memorandum of Understanding in place. One of the key points we will be addressing is the Senior Leadership structure to ensure there is a senior leader in both schools at all times.

The Governing Board recognises the need for stability and clarity. This is why we feel that it is right to further consider the option of partnership in more detail, If both Governing Bodies agree that federation is in the best interest of each school we will, of course, enter a formal period of consultation with all stakeholders in the near future.

The priorities for the school are the education and welfare of the children, providing as much stability and consistency as is within our control, to have development opportunities for the staff and as far as possible work within the budget the school has been allocated.

We will do our best to keep you informed on a regular basis of what progress is being made.

Carolyn Downes - Vice Chair of Governors