

21st July 2017

Dear Parent/Carer

As we fast approach the end of this academic year, we write to give you some insight into the work taking place throughout Darlinghurst Academy to drive forward the necessary improvements to ensure every child has the best start in life at our school.

I would firstly like to thank our staff for their outstanding efforts and resulting achievement during a period of great change for the school as we address the challenges raised by Ofsted in January's inspection report.

This end-year-report will reflect on three themes – **teaching and learning**; staffing, leadership and development; **the impact of the Rapid Improvement Board**; how we engage with our parents and finally **our school's learning environment**.

1. TEACHING AND LEARNING

The biggest illustration of the quality of teaching and learning is our fantastic results in the Year 6 SATs exams. The results showed:

- 78 per cent of our children achieve or exceed the expected standard in reading, up 21 per cent on last year. Nationally, 71 per cent of children have achieved this standard.
- In Maths, 75 per cent of our children achieve or exceed the expected standard, up 18 per cent on last year. Nationally, 75 per cent of children have achieved this standard.
- When we combine all our results, including reading, writing and Maths, 68 per cent our children achieve or exceed the national standard, an increase of 25 per cent on last year.

We have achieved this due to consistent, clear and strong leadership, giving advice and support to staff through "learning walks" and training, giving feedback to drive improvement and finally a strong focus on delivering our curriculum.

We have benefited from the advice and support of an outstanding academy trust, based in Hackney, to work with our staff, setting a clear vision of the action needed to help every child achieve. The SATs results illustrate the fact that our strategy is working.

In addition to this, we have used data effectively to track every child at Darlinghurst. This allows us to identify any areas where tailored intervention is needed to give our children help, encouragement and support in specific areas, allowing them to grow in confidence and ensure they succeed.

We have changed the focus of our Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) in the past six months. We identified a number of significant issues which meant that the way we deployed our LSAs was not effective enough. For example, an LSA may have been working with two year groups in a particular day. This meant that there was a lack of consistency and little "joined up" working to guarantee the best levels of support for our pupils. Our new way of working means that, in general, LSAs will be scheduled to work with specific year groups/classes, allowing them to support our teachers and offer the intervention needed on a far more consistent basis.

From September, Darlinghurst will adopt a new marking policy for pupils' books. This has been developed with our colleagues at other Southend primary schools. It sets out clear expectations in terms of regularity of marking. The style that we intend to use is simpler,

ensuring pupils (and parents) get clear and unambiguous feedback about written work. We will give you more detail about the new marking policy when we return in September.

The results in Year 6 were outstanding and we could not be more delighted. Our challenge now is to ensure this success firmly embedded across the whole school.

2. STAFFING, LEADERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT

We are delighted to welcome Leanne Hahn as Vice-Principal and Karinne Faddy as Senior Vice-Principal in September. Both Mrs Hahn and Miss Faddy have outstanding experience in teaching, learning and leadership. They will be of great support to Mrs Nicholls as we go into the academic year with drive, determination and focus on teaching and learning.

We would like to pay tribute to members of our staff who are leaving to take up new opportunities. We should note that eight teachers are leaving Darlinghurst, which is in line with the national average.

We are fully staffed for 2017/18 with very strong and experienced teachers in place. The appointments we have made will continue our drive to excellence. Those new members of staff joined us at our recent INSET day. The energy, determination and vigour from every member of staff was impressive and all those present are looking forward to the start of the new academic year in September.

Many of you have asked about the role of Principal at Darlinghurst. The decision as to when to appoint a permanent Principal will be taken by the Rapid Improvement Board. In the meantime, Mrs Nicholls will remain Interim Principal with the full support of the Board. Over the past six months, Mrs Nicholls has overseen a period of rapid and sustained improvement at Darlinghurst and we should all thank her for her dedication, drive and determination to create an effective learning environment, allowing every child to succeed and achieve.

3. IMPACT OF RAPID IMPROVEMENT BOARD

The Rapid Improvement Board has been in place for six months. It is chaired by Chris Hatton, a journalist and newspaper editor, supported by Bev Williams, Chief Executive Officer; Emma Nicholls, Acting Principal, and three other members including a lawyer, a former senior Essex Police officer and a headteacher with vast experience of primary school leadership and development.

The Board, which meets every fortnight, looks in detail at the challenges facing the school and holds our staff to account. A comprehensive action plan was produced in January detailing how the school needed to improve to return it to a 'Good' Ofsted rating swiftly. Crucially, the action plan is specifically aligned to the areas of improvement identified in the Ofsted report. At every turn, the Board has sought advice from established education leaders to ensure its decisions support the action needed to return the school to a 'Good' Ofsted grading as soon as possible.

Over the past six months, we have reviewed the school's systems, procedures and policies, ranging from safeguarding and marking children's books to staff development and training, developing the curriculum and effective data use to track the needs of every child. This has set Darlinghurst on an effective path to ensure the necessary improvements are made.

4. PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT/LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Many of you have contacted us about the new school uniform and logo. We are pleased to receive broad support from the parent community. We encourage all parents and carers to embrace these changes.

Linked to the improvements in teaching and learning, a need was identified to ensure the learning environment and ethos of the school set high standards and expectations. This does form part of the Ofsted inspection framework.

The new uniform and logo was considered an important part of the process of setting the school on a positive, upbeat journey forward as part of a whole-school agenda to ensure every child gets an excellent start in life at Darlinghurst.

It is important that every child arrives at school on the first day of term in September sharing the spirit of togetherness that the uniform and new logo brings. We look forward to the first day of term when all pupils will arrive refreshed and ready to learn in their bright, smart new uniform.

Parents have contacted us to discuss how best the senior leadership and Rapid Improvement Board should engage with our parents and carers. Some have asked when we will return to a Governing Body for the school.

In the short term, we will continue with the Rapid Improvement Board. However, we would like to set up a parental focus group to meet once every half term. This will consist of two parents from each year group to meet with the CEO, Principal and Chair of the RIB. This will be a two-way dialogue, allowing parent representatives to challenge, ask questions and give their views about issues affecting the school. It will be their responsibility to communicate with the wider parent body to ensure parents feel more comfortable with the quality and regularity of information coming from the school.

Any interested parent should email a short letter of application to info@legratrust.org.uk. If there are more than two applications from each year group there will be a vote to ensure proper representation. The deadline for applications will be 27th July 2017. The elected parents will be announced in September 2017.

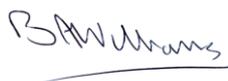
In conclusion, the past six months have seen significant and rapid change at Darlinghurst. We are proud of our staff and children for their outstanding work. We look forward to the new term in September when we can continue our journey to excellence.

Please find below a link to our parental survey to continue our journey on improving communication with each other.

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/BVCPHBK>

In the meantime, we hope all families have a refreshing and enjoyable summer break.

Yours sincerely



Bev Williams
CEO, Legra Academy Trust



Chris Hatton
Chair, Rapid Improvement Board