

OAK NEWSLETTER



CHRISTMAS 2024

A WARM WELCOME

Dear all

It is a pleasure to write to you at the end of the first full term of the academic year. It's been a hugely busy one with so many positive developments. Traditionally we've always included a piece of news from each of our schools, but as we have grown significantly in size, the newsletter will focus more on trust wide developments, with the inclusion of one or two individual school news items.

As some of you will be aware we officially welcomed three new schools to our family in September and it's been a busy start to the year on-boarding these schools and developing strong relationships with their communities. We kicked this development off by hosting an Oak conference at the start of term, bringing staff together from all of our schools. This development brings real strength to us as a group, it means we have a wider range of expertise to share and some economies of scale, so we can provide our schools with excellent business services and school improvement expertise.



It's been a pleasure to personally get to know staff and pupils in our new schools and at the same time observe the continued improvements being made at our existing schools. We are also working closely with other schools, including Fairfield Primary School, to bring additional richness to our group. As a school trust, any growth is about making an additional difference to the community joining us and having an impact on the pupils who already attend our schools. There has been a variety of trust wide activities taking place this term, all adding value to what we offer in our schools, including delivering professional development, networks, school reviews, safeguarding audits and hosting visiting speakers. It's what trusts should be about - actively sharing good practice and supporting each other to be the best we can be, whilst at the same time ensuring each school has the space to deliver what's right for their context.

I would like to wish everyone a merry Christmas and happy New Year. Whether you celebrate Christmas or not, I hope you manage to have some quality family time. I'm also aware that this time of year can be difficult for some and my thoughts are also with them.

James Franklin-Smith, CEO



NEW APPOINTMENTS AT OAK

We are delighted to welcome some new staff members to the team at Oak Learning Partnership. Joining our central team as Head of HR will be Laura Roberts, who will start in February. She joins us from the Co-op Academies Trust, a large NW based trust, and brings with her a wealth of experience and skills that will really strengthen our team.

We also successfully recruited Adele Hulton as Headteacher at Hazel Wood High School. Adele will join us in January after she impressed trustees and executive leaders throughout the recruitment process. Adele has been Deputy Head for a significant period of time at Middleton Technology School, so has a depth of experience working in very similar contexts to Hazel Wood. Adele understands inclusion and has dedicated her career to making a difference to young people, so we are thrilled to have her on board.

Other notable appointments that we will be advertising after Christmas will be the Headteacher's role at Crosshill School and a Head of IT role for the central team.

NURTURING TALENT

At Oak, a great emphasis is placed on nurturing, developing and retaining our staff. We do this in various ways so that we can provide our children with the highest standards of education and care. A great example of how we have nurtured talent internally is Jo Pagliuca, Assistant Headteacher at Elms Bank.

Jo said: "My career journey at Oak is testament to Oak's philosophy of nurturing talent from within. Throughout my development, I have been consistently supported and inspired by members of the senior leadership team and headteachers.

"I began my journey at Elms Bank in 2003, when I was a Teaching Assistant. Encouraged by my line manager, I applied for the position of Higher Level Teaching Assistant and later pursued a degree in teaching and learning, which I completed with a first class honours in 2013. Following this, I was promoted to the role of Instructor, focusing primarily on teaching in the English department.

"In 2017 I gained 'qualified teacher status' with a specialisation in English. This led to my appointment as Second in Department for English in 2018 and then as Director of English in 2019. In addition to this role, I successfully applied for an extra responsibility as an Induction Lead, and then became a Senior Middle Leader.

"Finally, in January 2024, I was honoured to be promoted to the role of Assistant Headteacher for teaching and learning on a secondment. This significant milestone in my career journey highlights the transformative impact of the dedicated support and encouragement I have received throughout my professional growth within Oak, for which I am truly grateful."



MYTH BUSTING: SCHOOL TRUSTS

With lots of new faces joining us for this edition of Oak News, we thought it would be a good idea to separate the fact from the fiction when it comes to school trusts, such as Oak Learning Partnership, and what their purpose is. So what is fact and what is fiction?

Trusts are private businesses

FICTION. Trusts are education charities that run more than one school, to give children a better future. By working with each other, schools can share staff, curriculum expertise and effective teaching practices.

Trusts are free to attend

FACT. Like any other state school, trust schools are free to attend, inspected in the same way and children take the same tests and exams. School trusts are state-funded.

Trusts are out to make profit

FICTION. As education charities, trusts are not allowed to make profits or distribute profits to trustees or members. All surpluses are invested into the front line to improve the quality of education.

Trusts can teach what they want

FICTION. Being a trust gives schools more freedom to decide on the best curriculum for their pupils. However, Ofsted requires them to offer a broad and balanced curriculum and they are inspected on that.

Trusts are not accountable to anybody

FICTION. They are held to account in the same way that maintained schools are. In fact, school trusts are subject to greater accountability than council-run schools because of increased financial regulation.



WHAT IS AN EXECUTIVE HEADTEACHER?

Last term we appointed Paul Greenhalgh as Executive Headteacher for Oak Learning Partnership. Paul is currently Headteacher at Hazel Wood but in January will take up his new role on a full-time basis. We thought this would be a good time to tell you more about the role of an executive headteacher and why they are an important element of a school trust.

Unlike a headteacher's role, the job of executive headteacher is not defined in law and there are no set requirements. At Oak, Paul's role is to have strategic oversight of the mainstream high schools in the trust and line manage the headteachers. His role differs significantly to that of a headteacher and whilst the following list isn't exhaustive, it does give a general overview of the role:

- Setting the long-term, strategic direction of the schools
- Determining the consistency of educational practice across the schools, for example looking at strategic developments in education and how they could apply to the group of schools
- Some financial responsibilities for mainstream schools, including setting budgets and organising contracts
- Mentoring and training - as well as line managing headteachers, an executive headteacher organises professional development for headteachers, setting them goals to ensure they are adequately trained and supported in their roles
- Developing the work of the schools - an executive headteacher takes the lead in addressing any underlying weaknesses in a school, developing the curriculum, helping to raise standards in terms of behaviour and results and providing intense modelling and coaching in what makes for excellent teaching
- Promoting a strong partnership between schools - this can be very helpful for schools in terms of mutual learning and the sharing of best practice and staff
- Trust wide responsibilities, including acting as the link between mainstream schools and the trust's executive team, ensuring the voice of mainstream schools is considered when planning strategic developments within the trust, taking trust wide responsibilities across all schools, reporting to trustees around performance of schools and contributing to the growth strategy of the trust



WHICH JOB NEXT?

Which job would you like to see featured next time? Maybe you're a member of staff reading this who wants their role featuring? Or a parent wanting to know more about a particular role. If so, please get in touch and send an email to obrien.s@oaklp.co.uk.

UPDATES FROM OAK OUTREACH

For those reading our newsletter for the first time, Oak Outreach is a service provided by the trust that delivers support for the inclusion of all learners across primary and secondary settings. The service can offer schools bespoke packages that involve a SEND review, followed by highly detailed action plans to support best practice. It also runs a range of courses and training for those working in education, including trauma informed practice, inclusive classrooms and behaviour de-escalation, as well as adaptive teaching to support numeracy and literacy at primary and secondary level.

This term has been a fabulous one at Oak Outreach. The team has continued to facilitate the 'One for All' offer for all of the schools within Bury, offering the SENCO (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator) network within the local authority with vital opportunities to meet, collaborate and problem solve together. This gives SENCOs a wholesome offer, whereby they are able to share their own professional knowledge, whilst also taking on board the advice and guidance from a range of professionals.

The team also ran their inclusion conference this term and were so pleased to welcome colleagues from across the authority, as well as staff within Oak LP, to share their knowledge and working practices. Thank you so much to colleagues for taking the time out to contribute to this event.

The training on offer this term has supported Oak's drive to equip colleagues, both within the trust and externally, to ensure that they feel supported to make effective adaptations, support communication and support structures in resource provisions and early reading and mathematics. Furthermore, the team has worked directly with Cloughside College to deliver training courses for our colleagues around mental health first aid and suicide awareness.

Finally, the team has continued to work towards ensuring that best practices are shared when working with learners with autism. In using the modules that are outlined within the Autism Education Trust training offer, the outreach team has been able to directly train some of our schools within the trust around the principles, as well as beyond.

A massive thank you to all contributing parties, from headteachers that have released their staff, to staff that have contributed to training and professional development.



ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS AT BCHS

Former students at Blackburn Central High School (BCHS) came together with staff to celebrate their accomplishments at the school's annual achievement awards.

The event, which the school hosts every year, was a wonderful opportunity to recognise the hard work, progress, resilience and determination of those students who left in the summer. A range of awards were presented to honour the efforts and successes of as many students as possible. It was so nice to see lots of the 2024 leavers, who shared exciting stories of their new adventures. It paid testament to the lasting bonds that are formed within the BCHS family.

Our CEO, James Franklin-Smith, attended the event to deliver a keynote speech. He said: "It was a wonderful evening and I was delighted to talk at the event. It was very clear that for many of the students, BCHS has created a positive, lasting impression on them and it made me feel extremely proud of the staff and students for building such strong connections."



WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Do you have something that you would like to see featured in the next edition? If so then we want to hear from you. Please send an email to obrien.s@oaklp.co.uk.

ELMS BANK RECEIVES PRESTIGIOUS AWARD

We are thrilled to share some wonderful news from Elms Bank, our special school in Bury. The school has been awarded the SENDIA (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Inclusion Award). This recognition reflects the school's dedication to creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment where all students can thrive.

The award acknowledges schools that demonstrate outstanding commitment to meeting the needs of learners with special educational needs and disabilities. At Elms Bank, this achievement highlights the strong collaboration between staff, students, families and the wider community to ensure every learner is given the tools and opportunities to succeed.

Gemma Parkes, Headteacher at Elms Bank, said: "Please join me in congratulating staff, students and families at Elms Bank for this well deserved recognition. Their achievement is a reminder of what we can accomplish when we work together to support every learner."

