



ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE TOGETHER

Astley Sports College & Community High School
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Executive Headteacher Mr M Bowler

Dear Families,

Re: Partnership Astley Sports College and Longdendale High School

Astley Sports College has probably gone through one of its busiest periods of change in the months since January 2016 and I would now like to provide you with an update on some of the key developments during this period. I would particularly like to share with parents the great news about the permanent arrangements for the leadership of Astley from September 2016.

In my first letter to you at the end of January I explained how important it is that we have effective communication with parents, carers and families so that you can develop an accurate understanding of your school. I was delighted to meet so many families at the Parents' Forum last term and share more fully my plans for the school. Previously I have highlighted the need for significant and rapid change to ensure better provision to improve the school. Given the situation at Astley we have acted quickly to identify priorities for immediate action, and begin the process of moving the school forward so that our students are able to thrive and be successful.

In this context, it has been crucial to find a long-term leadership model to help accelerate Longdendale's journey to becoming a world class school and also address Astley's underperformance. The temporary leadership arrangements put in place since January have been very successful and both sets of Governors have recognised the potential benefits of a shared leadership solution between the two schools.

To address Astley's underperformance it has been crucial to find a long-term leadership model for the school. Governors of both Longdendale High School and Astley Sports College have discussed and now agreed permanent arrangements. I can report that my role as permanent Executive Headteacher over both schools is now confirmed and full-time Headteachers have also been appointed for both Longdendale and Astley.

Astley Sports College Headteacher appointment

I am delighted to inform you that Ms Fay Beach has been appointed to the role of Headteacher at Astley Sports College. Ms Beach has been a key leader throughout her time as Deputy Headteacher at Longdendale High School and has a well-established track record of 'outstanding' leadership. Her impact at Longdendale over the last 5 years has been remarkable in all of her areas of responsibility. She is an experienced and talented leader and I have no doubt that she will further accelerate the improvements we have already seen at Astley since January. I look forward to working with her and continuing our vision for improvement at Astley in the coming years. Ms Beach will be writing to you herself during the course of the next week and I know that we all will wish her well in her new role.

Longdendale High School Headteacher appointment

I am also very pleased to report that Mrs Andrea Jones has been appointed to the role of Headteacher at Longdendale High School. This means that that I will be able to continue to work with her to secure the further success for Longdendale High School.

Improvement work at Astley Sports College since January 2016

In January we promised you unrelenting work and focus to ensure that Astley improves rapidly and we have made a very positive start to this vision of improvement. We have made significant changes to most systems and processes within the school and over the coming months and years we will see the positive impact that this will have on students’ academic progress and their personal development and well-being. Our aim is to give our students an excellent start in life through the very best educational opportunities which will lead to successful outcomes. As this summary shows, we have already made lots of major changes to improve the school:

Situation in December 2015	Changes from January 2016
No Headteacher	Executive Headteacher in post
No capacity in SLT	Two Associate Headteachers in post to support rapid improvement
Little impact from SLT	SLT restructured
No Business Manager	Shared Business Manager with Longdendale
Low capacity for improvement	Support from Longdendale and A+ Trust
Budget issues – e.g., Poor Pupil Premium spend with no evaluation of impact	Clear budget plan - Full Pupil Premium review completed with clear actions for improvement taken and planned
No key priorities to improve the school	Clear key priorities addressing areas of significant need
No effective school improvement planning	School improvement plan in place addressing all areas of priority
Inaccurate view of the school by key leaders	Accurate view of the school used to inform school improvement planning
Lack of distributed leadership in the governing body	New Chair and structure developed for the governing body
Low impact from some middle leaders	Comprehensive and systematic approach to the development of leaders at all levels with intensive training on all new systems and approaches. Support from outstanding leaders from LHS
No targets for teaching staff	Appraisal implemented and targets focused on student progress
Ineffective checking on the impact of the work of middle and senior leaders	Quality Assurance cycle implemented with clear evidence of significant improvement in the leadership of learning at middle/senior leader level – two full cycles completed with clear actions for leaders

Poor curriculum model not meeting the needs of Astley's students	New curriculum model in place
Poor provision for SEND	New interventions in-place based on prior attainment data from KS2 and supported by catch-up premium
Inconsistent target setting for students – lacking ambition	Targets for all students revised and implemented with students/parents –all based on the highest ambition
Assessment without levels national agenda not addressed	Comprehensive assessment without levels in place - clear and consistent approach. PRIDE pathway launched.
New GCSEs and curriculum change not addressed	All measures introduced and curriculum change implemented by middle leaders
Class of 2016 - EBACC qualifying - 10%	Curriculum plan ensuring coverage of EBACC for 87+% of students in current Year 8 and 9
Options pathways unambitious	Options completed with both Year 8 and 9 to accelerate improvement
Low impact from external support	High impact and capacity building from LHS
No effective focus on teaching and learning	Teaching and learning key priority for improvement – systematic approach to improvement
Little effective marking feedback in exercise books	New marking policy introduced
Vertical tutor model not working effectively to support student progress	Linear form group system established and tutor curriculum to support SMSC implemented
Flawed behaviour policy leading to exclusion crisis	New behaviour policy and inclusive approaches implemented Easter 2016.
Inability to recruit and retain high quality staff	Recruitment process for full staffing complement by Sept 2016
Little effective CPD for staff	Clear programme of CPD for staff

As can be seen from this brief overview of some of our work the school is currently going through a complete 'root and branch' period of change management. In order to tackle the significant and sustained underperformance of the school it has been necessary to address all these areas simultaneously which has created further uncertainty and disruption for everyone. We understand that this can be difficult for students, parents and staff but given the issues facing the school it has been vital that we deal with all aspects at once. Despite the short space of time and the distance the school has had to travel we have ensured new systems have been introduced and impact is rapidly developing. All the systems necessary for sustained improvement are now in place and evidence of impact is developing. The next phase in accelerating this impact has been secured in the permanent leadership arrangements and the recruitment of new staff for September. With the systems in place and the right people in post - the acceleration of improvement from September onwards will be even more significant.

Lastly, I would like to take the opportunity to thank everyone in the extended school community for the hard work and commitment shown to our rapid improvement of Astley in this period. We know it has not been an easy time for anyone. It is a great privilege to have been given the opportunity to lead Astley during this time of vulnerability and since joining the school I have been hugely impressed by the supportive response I have received from the majority of staff and their hunger to embrace the essential changes and manage all of the work that is involved in doing so. Staff at Longdendale High School have also been fantastic in their support for Astley and many leaders and support staff have given freely of their time and expertise in helping the school at this difficult time. I also need to note the support of both sets of Governors and our key Local Authority partners who have fully grasped the significant difficulties facing Astley at this time and the way in which they have embraced the challenges and supported me as Executive Headteacher in finding solutions to quickly accelerate the improvement of the school from the extremely low base that we inherited.

Thank you all for your continued support.

Yours faithfully,



Matthew Bowler
Executive Headteacher



Jane Barker
Chair of Governors