

2 September 2025

Dear parents and carers,

### **Proposed joining of Pontefract Academies Trust and Ark Schools**

Pontefract Academies Trust has a strong track record of school improvement. Since 2018 our schools have seen significant improvements in both secondary and primary performance, as well as in our Ofsted ratings. Our secondary schools now perform consistently above the national average and our primary schools have gone from being one of the lowest-performing nationally to among the best in the country for primary school outcomes.

Over the past year, the Pontefract Academies Trust board of trustees has been exploring how to build on our success to benefit more children, families, and staff in Pontefract and South Kirkby. Whilst we have strong outcomes for pupils and are highly ranked for performance, we believe in being even more ambitious for all our pupils. We want to take our schools further and have the ambition for Pontefract and South Kirkby schools to set the standard nationally. We believe that the best way to achieve this is to join forces with a like-minded trust. To us, like-minded means a trust that shares our values, has a strong track record in improving outcomes for pupils and is committed to the local communities that they serve.

We are pleased to inform you that Pontefract Academies Trust is planning to join with Ark Schools, combining the two trusts' expertise to deliver even stronger provision for the children, staff, and communities we serve.

Serving our communities is at the core of what we do. In exploring the proposed partnership this has been, and will continue to be, the trust's overarching priority. We also recognise that, to develop our work in schools further, being part of a larger network would bring significant educational benefits to pupils, families and our staff.

### **About Ark**

Ark is recognised as one of the highest achieving education trusts in the country and runs thirty-nine schools across Birmingham, Hastings, London, and Portsmouth, supporting nearly 30,000 pupils. Its mission is to ensure that all children have access to a great education and real choices in life, regardless of their background. Ark chooses to work where they can make the biggest difference and has been considering growth into new regions where there is strong local leadership and a commitment to delivering excellent results.

Recognising the alignment, shared ambition, and complementary strengths, the Boards of both trusts propose a formal merger, with Pontefract becoming the founding base of a new northern hub.

### **The work done so far**

This is not a decision that we have taken lightly, and both trusts have been in conversation to explore the feasibility of joining together for several months. We have got to know each other well and have held reciprocal visits to each other's schools and have taken a detailed approach to due diligence. As such, both trust boards have a strong appreciation and understanding of the benefits, opportunities, and risks associated with the proposed partnership and we believe that by coming together we would become greater than the sum of our parts.

### **Combined knowledge and experience**

This partnership would enable us to retain our Pontefract family of schools while benefitting from being part of a larger network. Larger trusts have greater resilience due to the combined resources, knowledge, and experience, as well as numerous opportunities for collaboration:

- Pupils will benefit from the experience and expertise of a larger network team and the collaboration between the two trusts. PAT has built a reputation for school improvement and high performance. Working with Ark's team brings more capacity to enhance provision – this will only positively benefit our pupils and families.
- Staff would benefit from greater collaboration opportunities, sharing teaching, support and operational expertise and best practice from a much wider network of colleagues. This enhances the provision for pupils in all schools. There is the opportunity to share ideas and resources with much bigger teams on a national level and access expertise from colleagues working in schools in similar contexts - even if not in the same locality.
- We know that the quality of teaching is one of the strongest indicators that pupils will do well, be happy and fulfil their potential. Staff would benefit from Ark's sector-leading professional development. This includes early career teacher programmes and teacher training which are rated as outstanding. Staff would also benefit from Ark's well recognised leadership development programmes. This increased access to professional development for staff flows through into the schools and classrooms. It improves the offer to pupils enhancing their learning experience, as well as benefiting staff recruitment, retention and career development opportunities.

### **How would this affect you and your children?**

We want to reassure you that there would be no changes to school-based staff as a result of the trusts joining. We are not proposing changes to how our schools operate or are led on a daily basis. This means the headteachers and wider school leadership, teaching, and support staff, many of whom you know, would remain the same.

Pontefract and South Kirkby schools reflect local needs, and this will continue. Our schools are embedded in the local communities they serve, and this is something we hold dear. There will be no loss of individual school identity and ethos, and schools will retain their names and uniforms.

PAT's central team and executive would become part of Ark's wider central team, with PAT trustee representation on the Ark Schools Board to ensure continuity, stability and integration between the

two trusts. Julian Appleyard, PAT's CEO, would lead the Pontefract Hub, which would become the largest regional hub in the Ark network outside of London.

### **Feedback and next steps**

Stakeholders, including staff, parents, and our wider school community, will be invited to share their feedback over the next few weeks, which the Boards of both trusts will take into consideration before submitting the application for approval to the Department for Education (DfE).

If approved by the DfE, the plan is for the merger to take place on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2026 and the trusts will work closely together over the coming year to explore even further all of the opportunities and to ensure a smooth transition.

As part of our school community, your views are important to us, and we would like to know your thoughts on our plans. We will be holding meetings for parents and carers on **Thursday 11th September at 5.30pm**, and **Monday 15th September at 10am**, these meetings will be held at Carleton High School.

We also welcome your feedback via the [online feedback form](#). For more information, please also refer to the FAQs on our website, which we will update regularly over the coming months.

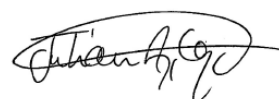
This is an important next step for our Trust. We are extremely excited about what we can achieve together with Ark to strengthen pupil outcomes further, invest in staff development, and increase our capacity to support pupils across our schools.

Thank you for your continued support.

Best wishes,



**Phil Jones OBE**  
**Chair of Trustees**  
**Pontefract Academies Trust**



**Julian Appleyard OBE**  
**CEO**  
**Pontefract Academies Trust**