**PROPOSAL TO JOIN THE ASCENT ACADEMY TRUST**

The Governing Board of Springwater set up an Academy committee in March 2023 to investigate whether joining an academy trust would benefit Springwater, a standalone maintained special needs school. The Committee carried out a structured and detailed review of three Trusts: Ascent, Horizons, and Wellspring.

The recommendation to join the Ascent Academy Trust was accepted by the Board of Governors in December for the reasons set out below.

**Benefits for pupils and staff**

1. Ascent have a culture and set of values that we believe strongly align with our own.
2. Ascent have a pupil profile in terms of age range and specialist needs that closely match ours.
3. The curriculum pathways to meet pupils needs in Ascent and Springwater are closely aligned. These factors are key in our ability to deliver the benefits of collaboration ensuring continuing improvements in teaching and learning for our pupils.
4. The Central Services within the Trust remove significant amounts of operational tasks from the Headteacher and other members of staff allowing them to focus on the education for the benefit of pupils. The IT team working closely with teachers will also benefit pupils
5. Staff development in the Trust is based on a coaching model supporting professional development that has enabled the Trust to deliver a highly successful leadership training programme. There is an effective succession planning process in all schools. The majority of all leadership teams have been promoted from within, and retention of staff is good
6. Ascent follow the National Pay awards for Teachers

**Financial benefits**

1. Trusts can apply direct to the DfE for additional capital funding (grants and loans), and SALIX funding (loans for energy saving schemes).
2. Joint procurement for contracts, goods, and services by the Trust for all schools provides better value for money than individual schools purchasing.
3. The Chief Operating officer sits on School Forums across the local authorities they operate in. This enables him to question authorities who are underfunding in comparison to others.

**Governance, Strategy, and Quality of the Trust**

1. The Ascent trust has a robust Governance model with a clear scheme of Delegation. Parents are represented on the Board of trustees. School Councils are responsible to the Trust for the quality of education, safeguarding, behaviour, and attendance.
2. Staffing structures and Budgets for individual schools are agreed by the Trust and the Headteacher.
3. The CEO and Trust Board has developed a clearly articulated Strategic plan with a set of five overarching objectives covering the curriculum, partnerships, wellbeing, development of people, and sustainability.
4. Both the Chair and the CEO are ex head teachers. The leadership teams are longstanding experienced SEND professionals, and the Trust Board members have extensive knowledge in SEND
5. Ascent have a strong Board of Trustees and central team who have a successful track record of delivery. They have built a well-constructed curriculum model using the collaboration of specialist teachers; and invested in improvements to the school’s estate and facilities, ensuring no group of pupils are left behind.
6. In summary: By deciding now, we can join a trust of our own choosing and deliver the benefits sooner than remaining as a standalone maintained school.

**Any disadvantages?**

The Board examined a number of areas that could be a concern:

1. Could Springwater lose its identity?

Response: Ascent is a small Specialist Trust with currently four schools with values similar to our own. Springwater will still be called Springwater, and the way pupils are cared for will stay the same

1. Additional costs as members of a Trust?

Response: All Trusts make a charge for their central services. In our case these are offset by a combination of the financial advantages set out above, and the cessation of payments to North Yorkshire for some of their services.

1. Distance from other Trust Schools?

Response: One of the lessons from the Covid pandemic was the use of video conferencing for groups of people to work together. Much of the specialist teacher collaboration uses this to cut out the time and cost of travel.

Secondly, Mowbray a special school in Bedale and Ripon is also applying to join Ascent

1. Changes to Staffing?

Response: We have not entered this with a view to reduce staffing. Staff will be transferred to Ascent under TUPE regulations which protect their current contract and conditions of employment

We are looking forward to working with Ascent and taking the opportunities this change offers. In summary we feel this move will be a great benefit to pupils and staff both now and in the future.