



30 January 2026

Dear parents and carers,

In September 2025, we proposed Pontefract Academies Trust joining forces with Ark Schools on 1st September 2026 combining the two trusts' expertise to deliver even stronger provision for the children, staff, and communities we serve. We are pleased to share that the Department for Education has now formally approved the proposal.

We are delighted about this news as we know that bringing together our two high-performing trusts will benefit the children, staff, and communities we serve. As outlined in September, this partnership will enable us to retain our Pontefract family of schools while benefitting from being part of a larger network. This will bring huge opportunities for knowledge sharing and collaboration across both trusts.

Both Trusts have already been working together very closely to make sure we are aligned in key areas, with mutual visits taking place between our two organisations. In October, the headteachers from each of our schools visited Ark's head office in London alongside the PAT central team; this was an excellent visit, and it was exciting to talk through some of the opportunities that the partnership would bring to each organisation. We will continue to work together over the coming months to ensure that this process is as smooth as possible.

Both trusts are excited about the opportunity to come together to strengthen pupil outcomes, invest in staff development, and increase our capacity and the offer for pupils and families so that each of our schools are places where children can thrive.

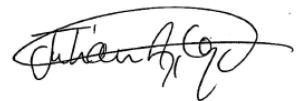
I want to stress that there will be no changes to school-based staff as a result of the merger. Headteachers, school leadership, teaching, and support staff will remain the same as they are now. As previously communicated there will be no change to how the schools operate or are led on a daily basis. Pontefract and South Kirkby schools reflect local needs, and this will continue. Our schools are embedded in the local communities they serve, and there will be no loss of individual school identity and ethos, and schools will retain their names and uniforms.

PAT's central and executive team will become part of Ark's wider central team. There will be PAT trustee representation on the Ark Schools Board to ensure continuity, stability, and integration between the two trusts. I will become Ark's Director of Growth and Regional Director (North), continuing to lead the Pontefract and South Kirkby family of schools – which will become the largest regional hub in the Ark network outside of London.

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

increase our capacity to support pupils across our schools and communities. We look forward to continuing to work in partnership with you through that.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Julian Appleyard OBE".

Julian Appleyard OBE
CEO
Pontefract Academies Trust