

March 2019

St Mary's School and 6th Form College / The Talking Trust
Joint statement from Governors, Consultant Headteacher
and East Sussex County Council

The report of the recent Ofsted education inspection, the residential inspection of November 2018 and the first monitoring visit report have now been published and are publicly available. The findings in these documents are accurate and fully accepted by the governing body.

The reports will be very concerning to everyone but particularly to parents and carers of children and young people at St Mary's and the placing authorities. The situation at St Mary's is very serious and requires urgent action. For this reason, the Governors, the Consultant Headteacher and East Sussex County Council have agreed to jointly inform you about the actions we are putting in place to address the key issues identified within the reports.

Our main aim initially is to provide stability and to ensure that safeguarding is secure at St Mary's. We will also be taking steps to ensure the overall quality of provision improves.

The Governors and East Sussex County Council (the Local Authority) have, with agreement and support from the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) and Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), agreed to work collaboratively to begin to secure improvements. Swift and effective action is essential in relation to both the Ofsted findings and also the financial situation of the school.

There have been some significant developments relating to St Mary's since the most recent Ofsted visits were undertaken in February and we would like to share these with you here:

Governance: The Local Authority and ESFA were rightly concerned by the residential inspection report that was published in November 2018. The Local Authority subsequently asked the Governors to put several measures in place in order to reassure them that the school could operate safely and effectively. At that time, the Governors did not accept the LA's proposals, deciding instead to put in place their own arrangements. After the February 2019 inspection, the Governors accepted proposals from the Local Authority, having had further discussions with both the council and the Regional Schools Commissioner's office. The Chair of the Governors and most of the governing body have, since, resigned, with only three governors remaining. The Governing body is now chaired by Jean Haigh, a retired, highly experienced education professional with a wealth of SEND experience in schools, local authorities and the DfE. Jean Haigh is currently a Director at Torfield and Saxon Mount Academy Trust, a nearby Multi Academy Trust of very successful special schools.

Once the options for the future operation of the school have been explored, the Governors are intending to establish an Interim Executive Board (IEB) and to delegate powers and authority to that Board in order to secure swift improvements in provision at St Mary's. The IEB will be made up of senior professionals from East Sussex County Council and Torfield and Saxon Mount Academy Trust. The IEB will also include independent educational consultants.

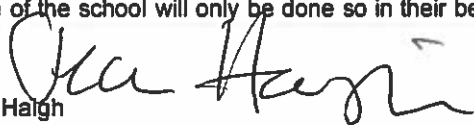
Leadership support: Since the new Chair of Governors has been in post (March 11th), Torfield and Saxon Mount Academy Trust has agreed to provide Consultant Headteacher Support to St Mary's. Richard Preece is the Executive Headteacher and CEO of the Trust and has many years of successful special school Headship and senior leadership experience. He will work to support the leadership team at St Mary's and the Governing body. He will also work alongside the IEB when this is established. Richard has an initial focus on ensuring effective safeguarding is a priority across the school.

Partnership work: The Chair of Governors has committed the board to working in partnership with the Local Authority, Consultant Headteacher and other agencies in order to secure the stability and future provision at St Mary's. All parties are working proactively to do this and the RSC is planning regular discussions with this group in order to monitor the progress made towards securing effective provision.

Next Steps: Alongside the immediate actions being taken to provide stability and address issues identified by Ofsted, St Mary's needs to ensure that it is financially secure. The IEB, alongside senior leaders from Torfield and Saxon Mount Academy Trust and with advice and guidance from the ESFA, will be reviewing and evaluating future options for the school. We will undertake to ensure all stakeholders are kept informed of the steps necessary to achieve a positive outcome in this regard.

We are aware that there are some outstanding decisions around placements for East Sussex children that have been delayed as a result of the recent inspection outcomes. The school and the Local Authority will be working together to evaluate these and will update parents as a priority.

We recognise and fully appreciate that the situation at St Mary's will cause uncertainty. However, the key parties now providing support and intervention are determined to keep the children and young people at the heart of all decision making. Actions taken to improve the provision and secure the future of the school will only be done so in their best interest.



Jean Halgh

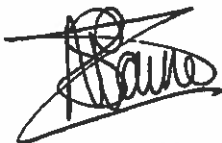
Chair of Governors, St Mary's



Richard Preece

Executive Headteacher / CEO

Torfield and Saxon Mount Academy Trust



Nathan Caine

Head of ISEND

East Sussex County Council